**EASTWOOD UNITING CHURCH**

**SEPTEMBER 5, 2021**

SERIES to build community

I’ve been meaning to ask. . .

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**. . . where are you from?**

We believe everyone is beloved, shaped from the dust of the earth and the breath of God. Everyone has a story to tell.

Our stories are messy and beautiful, painful and hopeful—being written and rewritten over time. We commit to disrupting our assumptions and staying curious.

**Creating Community with God**

**Preparation Song-** In Christ there is no east or west <https://youtu.be/V-1osqURF4g>

1 In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

2 In Christ shall true hearts ev’rywhere
their high communion find.
His service is the golden cord
close binding humankind.

3 Join hands, then, people of the faith,
whate’er your race may be.
All children of the living God
are surely kin to me.

4 In Christ now meet both east and west,
in him meet south and north.
All Christly souls are joined as one
throughout the whole wide earth.

**Lighting a candle**

Set our hearts on fire with love for you, O Christ our God
So that in its flame we may love you with all our heart,
With all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength,
And our neighbours as ourselves. Amen.

用對神你的愛來點燃我們的心，我們的主基督 好讓我們在祂的火焰中、全心全意地愛你， 用我們全部心思、全部靈與魂、全部力量，我們和我們的鄰居一起。 阿門。

너는 마음을 다하고 정성을 다하고 뜻을 다하고 힘을 다하여 주 너의 하나님을 사랑하라.’

**A Rite in Acknowledgement of Country** [Wednesday Bible Study Group]

*A rock is placed before the people.*
Over eons the earth has settled and formed.
The colours merge and the stories entwine.
May those who have kept the stories of God’s earth be honoured.

*Water is placed before the people.*
The flow of life ripples, finding cracks and crevices.
It glistens and sparkles with promise.
May those who quench a spiritual thirst be blessed.

*A candle or fire is lit.*
Darkness is banished with the sharing of warmth.
Relationships enlighten and corruption dissipates.
May the Light of the World be carried in the hearts of the People of God.

*The people stretch out their hands, palms upward.*
We reach out to God and to one another.
May God remake us as a Covenant People,
bound together by the Spirit of this Land and guided by Her First Peoples.

*We come from a Land down under* <https://youtu.be/i3ZVe-z3xnI>

**Call to worship**

We are from north and south.

**We are from tiny apartments and expansive homes.**

We are from this city and from others far away.

**We are from big families and dinners made for one.**

We are from stages of grief and stages of love.

**We are from hot summers and cool winters.**

We are from kitchens with passed down recipes,

and verandahs with BBQs for gathering friends
**We are from the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky.**

We are from a lot of places, but today we are here.
**Today we are together.**Holy God, gather us in.

**Prayer of confession** | **Truth telling**

When people heard that Jesus was from Nazareth,
they asked, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”
**We confess, God of beginnings, that we have asked the same question.**

Can anything good come from that side of town?

**From a school with poor test scores?**

From a criminal history?

**From the opposite political party?**

From a history of addiction?

**From a faith with doubt?**

From a church with faults?

**Holy God, forgive us for doubting that you are in all things at all times.
Open our eyes to see your goodness, not as something that resides here or there,**

**but as the expansive grace that it is.**

Can anything good come from there?

**Yes. Always yes. Amen.**

**Words of forgiveness**

Family of faith, if you ever ask yourself,
“Can anything good come from this messy and human life of mine?”

Remember this: God is always whispering, “Yes.”

You were created in the image of God.
Your origin story is one of goodness and love from the very beginning.

So hear and believe the good news of the gospel:

**God is here. God is at work among us.
We are forgiven. Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.**

**Human and Divine – encountering Jesus Christ**

**Prayer for illumination**

Holy God, we don’t always know how to pray, but you find us anyway.
We don’t always know how to listen, but you are in our ears all the same.
We don’t always know how to believe, but you surround us with beauty and
we find myself held together in love.
Where we come from there are so many distractions.

Where we come from there is so much noise.
Find us. Hold us. Be in these words. Help us hear. Amen.

**Readings**

 Genesis 2:4-15 [New Living Translation]

This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the Lord God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land. Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flowed from the land of Eden, watering the garden and then dividing into four branches. The first branch, called the Pishon, flowed around the entire land of Havilah, where gold is found. The gold of that land is exceptionally pure; aromatic resin and onyx stone are also found there. The second branch, called the Gihon, flowed around the entire land of Cush. The third branch, called the Tigris, flowed east of the land of Asshur. The fourth branch is called the Euphrates.

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.

 John 1:35-51 [New Living Translation]

The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them.

They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

“Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”).

Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

“Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

“How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”

Poem - We Are Not Strangers [Rev Sarah Are]

If you ask me where I’m from, I’ll tell you about the South

— about sweet tea, church pews, slow drawls, sultry summers. And if you pause,
then I may go on to tell you how I’m from a family of preachers,
how I stand on the shoulders of generations who believed that love

could be the answer.

And if you’re still listening even then,
I’ll tell you that I’m from strong women with tall spines who have carried the weight

of inequality on their backs with children on their laps.

And then I’ll tell you about the kitchens that I’m from,

which have always cooked enough
food for unexpected guests—just in case.

Or I could tell you about the car

that carried us into the mountains, summer after summer

so that we could breathe again. That’s part of where I’m from.

And if you haven’t given up yet, then I may even mention the dirt—

the earth that catches me, the earth that holds me.
The earth that reminds me of growth.
The earth that will eventually welcome me home.

You and I aren’t really strangers after all.

**Reflection – Dr Raj Nadella**

**Conversation – Led by Rev Amelia**

**Hymn – Community of Christ**

Community of Christ,

 who make the Cross your own,

 live out your creed and risk your life for God alone:

 the God who wears your face,

 to whom all worlds belong,

 whose children are of every race and every song.

Community of Christ,

 look past the Church's door

 and see the refugee, the hungry, and the poor.

 Take hands with the oppressed,

 the jobless in your street,

 take towel and water, that you wash your neighbour's feet.

 Community of Christ,

 through whom the word must sound --

 cry out for justice and for peace the whole world round:

 disarm the powers that war

 and all that can destroy,

 turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish into joy.

When menace melts away,

 so shall God's will be done,

 the climate of the world be peace and Christ its Sun;

 our currency be love

 and kindliness our law,

 our food and faith be shared as one forevermore.

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**Affirmation of faith**

**We believe that goodness can come from the dirt,**

**that faith can come from doubt,
that minds can be changed, that justice can begin with us,**

**and that something good *can* come from Nazareth.
We believe all these things,**

**because we believe that God is more expansive than we have words for—**

**showing up in the corners of our world so often ignored and denied.
We believe that from this place of holy surprise,
God invites us forward— beckoning hope, bravery, and curiosity from each of us.**

**“Come and see,” God says. We believe. Help our unbelief. Amen.**

**Empowering the Community’s Spirit**

**Invitation to the offering**

Jesus told the disciples, “Come and see.”
Come and see the healing that is about to take place, the meals at the Table,
and the little ones who will run to me.

Come and see the prisoners freed, the hungry fed, and the demons cast out.

Come and see the crowds and the walking on water
and the prayers in the garden. Come and see!

Friends, we are being invited to come and see a deeper life of faith.

One of the ways we can say yes is by giving what we have—

time, money, and/or our talents.
So let us say yes to this invitation of faith together.

Let us give our tithes and offerings. Amen.

**Passing the Peace**

**Prayer of the people**

God of North, South, East, and West, we have been meaning to say... thank you.
Thank you for scooping up the dirt and breathing life into it.

Thank you for forming this body, this life, this world, these people.
Thank you for drawing us in, for holding us up, and for weaving us together

— even when it’s hard, *especially* when it’s hard.
If people ask, “Where are you from?” my mouth speaks of geography,
but my soul always sings your name.

So today we come to you in prayer with gratitude overflowing— gratitude for the places we’ve been, for the people who’ve shaped us, and for the spaces we call home.

But we also come to you with prayers on our hearts.

*…prayer requests…*

And so we ask you to scoop us up like you scooped up the dirt on that first day.

Hold our hearts alongside our worries. Relieve us of this burden.
Protect us in the palm of your hand, and draw us closer to one another as you do.

God of creation, you have always been our first home,

So hear our prayers for the spaces we call home today.

We are inviting you in. Come and see.

**Song - A Covenant of Grace** **Tune: O Waly Waly**

We all come from the dusty earth

And from the places of our birth

Ancestral stories, who we’ll be

We bring it all to “come and see”

We all have wounds that no one sees

Oppression, trauma, and disease

When we bear witness to the pain
It can begin to heal again

We all need people who will be

with us in solidarity
No explanation, no defence

Just ministry of their presence

Surprised by God’s unboundless love

From many walks of life we come
To build a covenant of grace
And in our differences embrace © anna strickland, 2021

**A benediction**

Family of faith, as you leave this place,

may God grant you the curiosity to counter assumptions,
the vulnerability to befriend,
the bravery to speak your truth,
the wisdom to listen,
the strength to ask for help,
the resiliency to choose love, even when it’s hard,

and the awareness of the Holy Spirit always beside you.

In the name of the Great Connector—Love itself, go in peace.