

Surf Coast Uniting Churches

Sunday 1 March 2026



Introit Be Still for the Presence of the Lord

Welcome

May the worship bless you

Acknowledgment

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We acknowledge the Wadawurrung people, traditional custodians of this land under God. We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship

Adventurous God

Travelling Lightly

Breathe in us

Courageous God

Confronting injustice

Breathe in us

Mysterious God

Blowing Wildly

Breathe in us

Pilgrim God

Light in our darkness

Breathe in us

All our nights and days

Prayers

Ruth Harvey, Eggs and ashes, edit. Ruth Burgess & Chris Polhil, Wild Goose Publications 2004

www.ionabooks.com

Lord, our God
 you have called us to be a people
 with purpose
 travelling without a map
 travelling to where we are led
 sustained by your Spirit
 committed to the gospel
 by the hope of the world.

Take us on our journey
 from where we are to what you want us to be
 so that we become a community
 where all are welcomed and no one is excluded
 all are valued and no one is made to feel inadequate
 all are forgiven and no one is ashamed to belong
 all are encouraged and no one is too hurt to come among us

Lead us on our journey
 from who we are to who you want us to be
 so that patience is built into us
 kindness is assumed in us
 gentleness is part of us
 compassion flows from us
 truth is second nature to us
 and the commitment of love is part of us. Amen

Hymn 619 Have faith in God my heart

Have faith in God, my heart,
 trust and be unafraid;
 God will fulfil in every part
 each promise he has made.



Psalm 121

A traveller says: I lift up my eyes to the hills—
 from where will my help come?

His friend replies:

² My help comes from the LORD,
 who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot be moved;
 he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

⁶The sun shall not strike you by day
nor the moon by night.

⁷The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

⁸The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

John 3:1-17

3:1Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.

3:2He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person."

3:3Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

3:4Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

3:5Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 3:6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit 3:7Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'

3:8The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

3:9Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

3:10Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

3:11"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. 3:12If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

3:13No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

3:14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

3:15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

3:16"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

3:17"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Hymn 655 O let the Son of God enfold you

O, let the Son of God enfold you
with his Spirit and his love;
let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul;
O, let him have the things that hold you
and his Spirit, like a dove,
will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Sermon

in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen



Photo Ricky French – used with Permission

I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where will my help come from?

Two friends are travelling together. One only sees obstacles. Perhaps they are unwell, or tired, or lonely. They trust their friend and tell them how they are feeling. They ask for help. Their friend shares how God is always there for them and reassures them, God will help you too.

Psalm 121 is about friendship, encouragement, empathy and love. It's about telling our friends all will be well and being there when they feel burdened and have lost hope. It's about being there for our friends. Showing people we care. God cares.

Sometimes people feel overwhelmed and only see obstacles. They are so worn down by life they cannot see a way forward. Perhaps they become critical, bitter, jealous and judgmental and lose joy and hope. Perhaps life or people have treated them harshly.

Perhaps they long for a safe place where they can be accepted and treated with gentleness and love. They long for a friend who will stand by them, no matter what.

The hymn What a friend we have in Jesus invites us to carry everything to God in prayer. Reminds us Jesus is our friend. We can share our sorrows and troubles with Jesus. He is faithful and we need not be discouraged. When we are weak and heavy laden and burdened Jesus is our refuge.

A friend can be an individual or a church. Can care for a close friend or a community. A friend and church can be a presence, like a beacon of light and hope in a dark world. someone to trust, to lean on and find hope, someone who cares and is companion during tough times when all seems lost.

Our Surf Coast Linked congregations are judged by the community on how well we love them as friends. When we love them, they tell their friends. When we don't love, they tell their friends.

People don't join and stay at churches because they have nice buildings, comfortable seats, interesting activities, great music, good sermons and lovely cakes. They stay because they feel loved, accepted, listened to and they sense empathy, healing, and care. They feel the Spirit moving in amongst the people and in their heart.

Church isn't a club. it's a presence in the community. Each one of us is called to be a friend to members of a community and the community around us will know whether or not our hearts genuinely care about them.

I have always loved this image.



A blind lady is reading to a blind man. They may be family or friend.

Spend a moment contemplating this image.
The woman seems to be patient and loving. The man is smiling.
What do you feel is happening in this image?

I wonder.

How do you long to be loved and cared for? What's important to you? Then try to listen deeply to your friend and try to stand in their shoes.

We are like icebergs – we are complex. Sometimes we don't know ourselves, our deepest needs, longings, hopes, wounds, compulsions. Sometimes we have been friends with someone for almost a lifetime, and we think we know them. Then we go to their funeral and discover who they really are and even don't know their deepest secrets.

I don't think the story of the two friends in Psalm 121 tells us everything about the two friends. It tells us one friend was doing it tough, and their friend tried their best to comfort, care and reassure them at a low point on their journey. They are there for them. That's what counts.

Most people can sniff out whether someone genuinely cares for them and wants to be there for them. That's the cement of friendship. That's what keeps people together. That's the true test of a loving congregation. That's why the Holy Spirit draws people to some congregations and not others. Love is like a magnet.



Which brings us to today's gospel.

Nicodemus has taken an enormous risk to come and see Jesus. He is leader of the Jews, and a Pharisee. He comes at night in the darkness, hoping not to be seen. He knows Jesus comes from God, and God is with him, because of Jesus of what Jesus has done for people and how God has worked through him.

Jesus has a puzzling conversation with Nicodemaus about being born from above, and of water and the Spirit and the differences between flesh and Spirit. The Spirit is like the wind and so is someone born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus says, 'How can these things be?'

Jesus reveals his divine identity. Indirectly, leaving it up to Nicodemus to make sense of what Jesus is saying to him.

Ascending and descending from heaven, and his death, being lifted up, as the Son Man. He compares this with stories about Moses.

Jesus reveals his true nature – as the Son of God. He says t whoever believes in him will have eternal life.

Jesus speaks of himself in the third person. God sent him to save the world, not condemn it.
I wonder what Nicodemus sensed about Jesus

I wonder what he felt. What did his heart tell him?
Was this a spiritual experience for him?
Something must have happened.

The next time we hear about Nicodemus he is helping Joseph of Arimathea to claim the body of Jesus from Pilate. He has brought expensive and precious embalming oils to embalm Jesus body, and he helps place Jesus body in a new tomb.

Nicodemus risks everything to do this for Jesus. He helps bury his body with dignity. He risked his life, his family's lives, his position in the temple and in his position in the Jewish community.

He has become Jesus' friend.

I wonder how far each one of us would you go for one another, for our family, friends, the community and for God

The Lord be with you

Hymn 590 What a friend we have in Jesus

What a friend we have in Jesus
all our sins and griefs to bear,
what a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer:
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations,
is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness:
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
 cumbered with a load of care?
 Jesus is our only refuge:
 take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Do your friends despise, forsake you?
 Take it to the Lord in prayer;
 in his arms he'll take and shield you,
 you will find a solace there.

Joseph Medcott Scriven
 1819-86 *alt.*

Offering

Lord, giver of every good thing, we bring to you our lives, gifts and resources for the building up of your kingdom and church. We give thanks for blessings and transformation that come through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

Prayers of the People

Prayers for peace for the world and for each one of us

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come, your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins as we forgive
 those who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Hymn 164 The Great love of God

The Great love of God
 is revealed in the Son,
 who came to this earth
 to redeem every one.

That love, like a stream
 flowing clear to the sea,
 makes clean every heart
 that from sin would be free.

It binds the whole world,
 every barrier it breaks,
 the hills it lays low,
 and the mountains it shakes.

It's yours, it is ours,

O how lavishly giv'n!
the pearl of great price,
and the treasure of heav'n.

Daniel Thambyrajah Niles 1908-70

Blessing

In the deserts of this world,
may we find signs of God.
In the wilderness of our lives,
may we be encouraged by God.
In our joy and in our sorrow,
may we rejoice in God. Amen

Hymn 779 May the feet of God