

TOORAK UNITING CHURCH
Order of Service

MUSIC:

Behold a pale Horse (1991) Stephen Montague (1943)

The inspiration for this work is from the New Testament, *The Apocalypse* in the Book of Revelation 6:7-8, where John describes his terrifying vision of the last of the Four Horsemen:

“And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hellfire followed with him. And Power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with all the beasts of the earth

The melodic material is based on two sources: Thomas Celano's 13th Century *dies irae* sequence for the Mass of the Dead, and the tritone interval (F - B on the keyboard), “the devil in music” as Medieval music theorists called it. - note by Stephen Montague

This music graphically expresses something of the overwhelming power and destruction that we imagine those caught in the recent bushfires would have experienced. It is apocalyptic in effect and creates a starting point from which we begin our service of healing and hope.

THE GATHERING OF GODS PEOPLE

GREETING: Welcome in the name of Christ.
God's grace, mercy and peace be with you
and also with you.

WELCOME

Welcome to all of you who have come to this special community service of prayer and music.

My name is Anneke Oppewal. I am the minister of this Church. I and those leading this special service represent the four member Churches of the Toorak Ecumenical Movement which has organised this evening's community memorial occasion.

Although we as a community are not in the immediate area where the bushfires did their devastating work, I don't think there is anybody who has not been affected by what has been happening over the last two weeks. Not only through the news and the media, but through personal networks of family and friends, colleagues and communities, reaching far into the heart of the bushfire areas.

We all know somebody, or know of somebody who has suffered loss. We have all heard stories first or second hand. We are all reminded by the smoke haze in the air that something has happened, is happening, very close to our own homes and hearts.

Filling us with all kinds of emotions and questions that

need to be addressed and worked through.

We hope there will be something for everyone in this service to take home. We hope there will be something that will speak to you and be helpful in whatever way you are or feel affected by this tragedy. We will try, without denying the terrible reality, to find hope and healing as we gather here together.

Two of our musicians tonight, Andrew on the organ and Jean on the flute, live in Kallista, near the beautiful Sherbrooke Forest. They have been on tenterhooks for the last two weeks as they are in a fire-prone area. They have been evacuated, have heard the sirens go many times and have a suitcase with their valuables and a set of clean clothes stored away from home. Andrew chose the music for tonight and Jean wrote a beautiful reflection for her piece later on in the service.

CALL TO WORSHIP

From a world crying out for help and hope

We come to you God of love and healing

From a world broken and charred

We come to you Christ to hold and guide us

Seeking support and reassurance

We come to you Spirit of strength and inner peace.

Amen.

HYMN: O God of Mighty Wind and Flame
... written for 2006 Californian bushfires

Tune: ELLACOMBE

O God of mighty wind and flame
who fills your church with power,
We gather here in Jesus' name,
to ask your help this hour.
When nature's might seems far too strong
and flames are swirling high,
When days bring fear and nights are long,
Lord, hear your people's cry.

Some, having not the time to pack,
lost all they left behind;
We pray that when they can go back,
your strength is what they'll find.
As they are grieving,
bending low to sift through ash and stone,
We pray that soon, again,
they'll know the comfort of a home.

Some labor hard for little pay;
their blessings seem so few.
They don't have homes to save this day-God,
keep them close to you.
Some risk their lives and give up sleep,
to fight the fires so long;
In this, the vigil that they keep,
God, keep them safe and strong.

O God in whom we live and move--
when lives are torn apart,
Give us, your church, abundant love
to heal each broken heart.
And when we see our neighbors' pain,
give us the grace to share,
Till like a gentle, needed rain,
new hope will fill the air.

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OPENING PRAYER

God we come before you,
longing for words of comfort and hope.
Our heads and hearts are full of images of devastation,
we feel small and insignificant
in the face of this tragedy that is affecting so many people.
There are no words for what we need to express.
We come to lay at your feet
what is too big for us,
what is beyond our comprehension
what our minds refuse to deal with
and we ask for your compassion - to take it
and lift it into your healing presence

How can we help? What can we do?
Where do we start?
God we come before you,
our heads spinning, our hands itching for action,
Support us and guide us,
show us where our best efforts should be.
And where our arms are too short
and our hands don't reach,

reach out with your hands to those in need
and give courage and strength at this time.
Help those who are helping,
Support those who are supporting,
relieve those who are relieving,
love those who are loving,
in the midst of ash and dust,
of destroyed homes and blackened forests.

God we come before you,
and we lift our heads to seek your face.
Come to us with your presence,
fill us with your peace.
We bring before you
the miracle stories of loved ones found
and the terror of loved ones lost,
the generosity of millions
the amazing courage and stamina of emergency services
and the unspeakable possibility of evil intent
We bring it before you O God
and lift it up to your presence.
Hold shattered lives together,
Embrace the broken hearted
Fill hearts emptied by grief
with love, healing and peace of mind.
And when the nightmares come and replay the horror
lift the dark blanket of despair from those who need you
close. In Jesus Name.
Amen.

*From time immemorial at these times of sadness, where
people have had to deal with death and devastation*

beautiful music and poetry has been composed or used to express the feelings of sadness, of loss, of anger and of hope and trust that seek to be expressed at these times. The hymn we sung, the music we heard and will hear and the reading we will listen to are each in their own way in that category.

The hymn sprang from a personal experience of the devastation fire can bring, the Stabat Mater has comforted many who identified with Mary, weeping at the Cross, and the 23rd Psalm has, over many centuries, comforted people in situations of difficulty and loss.

MUSIC: Stabat Mater

Stabat Mater - Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710 - 36)

Soloists Bente Lancaster & Catriona De Vere

At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

READING: **Psalm 23**

CHOIR: Thou Knowest Lord the secrets of our hearts

Henry Purcell 1659 - 1692

Thou Knowest Lord the secrets of our heart

Shut not thy merciful ears unto our prayer

But spare us Lord most holy

O God most mighty

O holy and most merciful Saviour,

Thou most worthy judge eternal
Suffer us not at our last hours
For any pains of death to fall from thee.

Words from the Book of Common Prayer 1662

REFLECTION:

What has your main, overriding feeling been over the last two weeks? I would like you to reflect on that questions for just a few minutes before we reflect in a more general sense on what has been happening over the last two weeks.

What was your main, overriding feeling?

Was it helplessness? Anger? Grief? Sadness? Compassion? Frustration? Fragility? Vulnerability? Pride in what Australians can do in the face of disaster? Awe? Devastation? Helplessness? Fear? Loss? Loneliness?

My guess is that it was probably a mixture of some or all of the above, with perhaps even other feelings, well or not so well defined, that I have not named.

A jumble, brought about by the news, the horrific pictures, and the stories coming to us through our various networks, clinging to us like the veil of smoke haze to the City high rise.

It is there and it doesn't go away.

Even when we go back to work and immerse ourselves in it, even if we translate our emotions into actions by fundraising and organising help, even if we turn the television and the radio off for a while, somehow we have to

deal with the fact that death has come very close, that devastation and trauma this time is not a distant thing, but something that relates very closely to us, personally and as a community.

Those fires aren't even two hours away, we know some of the people personally, we know Marysville, we know Kingslake, we know some of the other places, some of the devastation is ours.

So where do we go? What do we do?

I think what we have seen people do and what we are doing tonight is to rally together and seek and find the support of community.

To no longer be alone in this, but together. To be together, to literally hold "it" together, to remember, to figure out what we can do, to discover what will bring healing.

That's what we have seen happening in the communities in the areas that have been hit by the fires, that's what we are doing now. Because there is nothing worse than being alone and without support when we have to find our way through shock and trauma, when we are exposed to something we find difficult to understand or deal with, when we are confronted with what destroys us, with our own vulnerability and mortality.

Psalm 23 has offered people a handle on how to deal with

those feelings and emotions over the centuries.

And, over more than two and a half thousand years, people have found these words held as they were going through whatever it was they had to deal with.

“Even if I walk through the valley of death”, there solidness in those words and truth that withstood the test of time and experience. They don’t offer cheap hope, they do not deny the reality of devastation, of pain, of raw emotions, of not knowing what to do and how to help. It is all there. But there is also the promise of God’s presence in all of that, somehow.

Perhaps we should stop there and go no further. Because it is not the time to go further yet. First we need to acknowledge together our struggle with what has happened. Trusting there is something even bigger than the sadness we feel that will hold us and take us through.

WE RESPOND TO GOD’S WORD

Let us remember now the people who have died and those who are grieving because of their loss.

Let us remember and after listen to some beautiful music evoking the forest in all its beauty, remembering it, and very tentatively, letting hopes and dreams of the promise that death will not have the last word take root in our hearts.....

PRAYER

We all love to be remembered.
But if we want to be remembered,
we have a duty also to remember.

Memory is a powerful thing.
Wrongly used it brings death.
Rightly used it brings life,
and is a form of immortality.
It keeps the past alive.
Those we remember never die;
they continue to walk and talk with us.

We remember you
who lost your life in the bushfires.
We remember you.
And your memory most definitely
brings life to us today.
We also pray for your families
and loved ones who have suffered so much and miss you.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May the Lord let his face shine on you,
and be gracious to you.
May the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace.

MUSIC: Mario Lavista - *Canto del alba (Dawnsong)* for
amplified flute

*“Seated alone, amongst the trees, I play the ch’in, and
whistle, whistle, whistle. Nobody hears me in the
immense forest, but the white moon illuminates me.”*

Wing Wei (Tang dynasty)(tr JP)

Mario Lavista (b. Mexico, 1943) wrote Canto del alba in 1979.

The music evokes the feelings experienced whilst sitting amidst the intense beauty and stillness of the mountain forest. We hear strands of sounds spring from suspended tones, floating, implying pitches and anticipating resolutions; a sense of a melisma, a gathering of multi layers, overtones and slides through an allusive microtonal expression, as an evocative and startling sound-scape of extended flute resonance unfolds. The introspective mood is intense, enveloping, astounding. As in the forest, the listener is drawn into engagement from the physical act of listening to quiet; perhaps watching from afar, perhaps immersed in the environment. The forest is an amazing place!

As I wrote these words I looked up frequently at the beauty outside my window in Kallista: at northern hemisphere trees in our garden against a backdrop of the mountain ash of the forest. Dappled light, a slight breeze, the occasional flash of a rosella or cockatoo. The fire siren began

Jean Penny

PRAYER

Almighty God, we have come to you with hearts full of thoughts that cannot be easily put into words.
We have come to remember
and pray for those immediately affected,
and for the wide circle around them

including ourselves
who need your healing and support.

Lord hear us

Lord hear our prayers.

We stand in awe of the power of nature
with its terrible forces in this dry land,
as we are reminded of our vulnerability as human
creatures.

We bring to you our questions, our jumble of emotions,
the images of devastation and the memories of beauty and
serenity in places where nothing much has been left.

Lord hear us

Lord hear our prayers.

We pray for those who grieve the loss of family,
friends and neighbours,
for the loss of properties,
for those who are injured, separated, and traumatized,
we ask for your healing presence in their lives
and we commend to your love all those who have died.

Lord hear us

Lord hear our prayers.

We give thanks for all of those
who have been involved in the relief operation,
CFA, Police, Army, and medical personnel in the field and
the injured in hospitals.

Be with religious organisations and government forces
as they minister to the people. Sustain them through this
time of tremendous loss and stress.

Lord hear us

Lord hear our prayers.

Be near to us, God of peace.
Amid the hurt and anguish
let loose your healing and your reconciling power.
Lord hear us

Lord hear our prayers.

Be near to us, God of love.
Amid the needs of so many
Come with your extravagant kindness and your goodness.
Lord hear us

Lord hear our prayers.

Amen.

We want to do, we want to act, and we have seen in those last two weeks what we are capable of when we rally together. We have been neighbours to people we don't even know, we have fed people, found them shelter and cared for them in the midst of disaster. And I am sure we will continue to do so, as a community and each individually.

HYMN: 629 When I needed a neighbour

When I needed a neighbour,
were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

Refrain:

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?

Refrain

I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?

Refrain

When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter, were you there?

Refrain

When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer, were you there?

Refrain:

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
I'll be there.*

Sydney Carter, 1915–2004

Words and music by permission Stainer & Bell, London

BENEDICTION:

May the God of love go with you
May the Christ of compassion travel beside us
May the healing and restoring power of the Holy Spirit
fill us and nurture us on the way that lies ahead.

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

POSTLUDE

Thank you for coming and may God bless us all as we each do our part in assisting the journey of recovery.

We encourage you to donate to any of the various bushfire appeal funds as you see fit. Many are being advertised through the media and each of our Churches has their own appeal working hard to help make a difference.

Manna Café is open for supper after the service and profits are being donated to the Red Cross Bushfire Appeal.