

ORDER OF SERVICE

Sunday 2 May 2021

Welcome and Notices
Mr Keith Ferres, Session Clerk

Hymn 207
Christ is made the sure foundation

Prayer of Invocation

Young at Heart
Christine Bradbeer

Bible Reading: Acts 2:38-47
Sonya Rutherford

Hymn 191
Come down, O Love Divine

Sermon: Acts #3
Four Vital Signs

Prayer of Intercession
and
The Lord's Prayer

Hymn 490
Blest be the tie

Benediction



NOTICES

2 May 2021

Website: www.blackburnpc.org.au

Tuesday 4 May 9.30 am Commission of Assembly
Trinity Church, Camberwell
Wednesday 5 May 1.30 pm Prayer Meeting.
Sunday 9 May 11 am Divine Service. Acts #4
All Welcome Covid safe practices.
NB May 17-21 7.30 pm One Heart: Whitehorse
Churches Care: Week of Prayer

For your prayers this week

Congregational member: **Grant McCarthy**
with Candice and baby Ava.
and



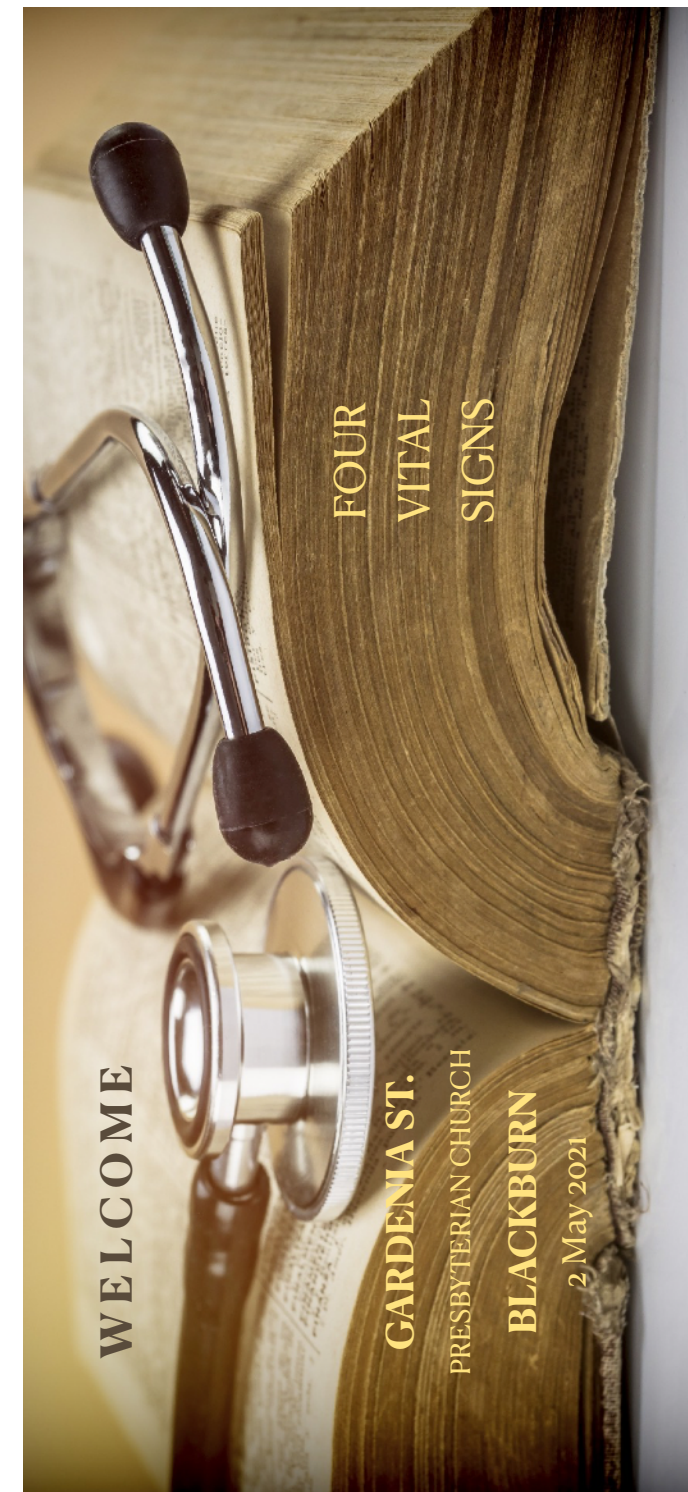
Rosie T works with Pioneers for
AW Media. Pray for new
believers who have been
trapped in dangerous situations because of
lockdown.

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Militias, armed groups and third states, backing warring parties, committed violations of international humanitarian law, including possible war crimes, with impunity. Fighting in and around the capital, Tripoli, and other cities in western Libya between forces loyal to the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) led to the killing and wounding of civilians, mass displacement, and damage to civilian infrastructure, including hospitals. ...

Officials, members of armed groups and militias, and criminal gangs systematically subjected detained refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants to torture and other ill-treatment, unlawful killings, sexual violence and forced labour. Military courts handed down death sentences; no executions were reported.

Amnesty International

Libya has no freedom of speech, no freedom of religion and it is almost impossible to follow Jesus publicly. Sharing your faith is illegal and Libyan Christians from a Muslim background face violent and intense pressure to renounce their faith. Although there are around 34,500 Christians in the country, only a small number are Libyan. The majority are expatriate and migrant workers.

Christians in Libya face the daily threat of being abducted or killed by Islamic extremist groups. Christians migrating from sub-Saharan Africa are also vulnerable to being held in a detention centre, abused, tortured and extorted by those trafficking them. Without a central government, there is rarely justice when Christians are persecuted.

Open Doors

VITAL SIGNS

Sermon Notes

At several points in Acts, Luke gives a cameo of the life of Jesus' disciples as they related to one another and the wider community. The first of these cameos is in Acts 2: 42-47. Luke helps us to see how the disciples of Jesus, later to be called *Christians*, (Acts 11:26) stood out as different in the ancient world. His cameo reveals four vital signs.

1. A learning church (Acts 2:42)

With over 3000 new believers from all parts of the Empire on the day of Pentecost there was much for the apostles to teach about Jesus. The disciples devoted themselves to this teaching.

As Jesus had taught about the Messiah from the (Jewish) Scriptures, now the apostles had to continue that work. Astonishingly, the 'back story' of the Messiah included his rejection, death and resurrection.

There was much to teach and learn.

2. A loving church (2:42)

Despite their diverse language and ethnic backgrounds their shared knowledge of God in Christ the Messiah made them a family. This is 'fellowship' at the deepest level. They regarded one another as 'brothers and sisters'.

This resulted in a culture of material sharing. This helped new believers who had come for Pentecost and were a long way from their homes.

3. A worshipping church (2:42)

The 'breaking of bread' and 'the prayers' to seem to refer to both formal and informal acts of devotion. In their own homes (informally) and at the Temple (formally), Christ was ever present to them.

This balance in their worship was reflected in both joy and reverence. We see both joy and awe as the Holy Spirit works in the church.

4. A witnessing church (2:47b)

This picture of the *interior* life of the church was set in a context where the witness to Jesus was being proclaimed *externally*. The result was growth.

The Lord was adding to their number (daily) those who were being saved. The tense of the verb suggests that for the believer salvation is a progressive experience culminating in glory.

"So what was distinctive about this new community? A very great deal. The most obvious features being:

For a start, the Christians thought of themselves as a family, what the sociologists call a 'fictive kinship group' – despite the fact that they were from many different nations and ethnicities, that they included slaves and free together as brothers and sisters, that they were trans-local as well as trans-ethnic.

Second, the Christians were an astonishing learning community, in a world where education was for the elite. They taught people to read, to read the Bible, to catch up on the back history of the Messiah whose family they had joined.

Third, they were cheerfully egalitarian in a world of rigid class and gender division.

Fourth, they were outward-facing and philanthropic, known for helping not only fellow Christians members but the poor at large. Indeed, at one point the Roman authorities didn't know much about who these Christians were but they knew that they had people called Bishops who were always banging on about the plight of the poor.

Fifth, they were ethically rigorous in a world where moral standards were mostly very lax: the pagan medical doctor Galen, at the end of the second century, didn't know much about Christians but he knew that they believed in resurrection and that they didn't sleep around – both, of course, reflecting the high value the Christians put on the body. Galen thought they were mad on both counts, but he respected them for their tenacious holding to their way of life.

Sixth, like the Jews in general the early Christians didn't do abortion and infanticide – both widespread practices, especially getting rid of unwanted baby girls. (That is why there were more Christian women than pagan women in the third century, resulting in many mixed marriages and many children being brought up Christian.)

Seventh, they were non-retaliatory: their rule of life, just as you see in the persecuted Coptic church today, was to follow Jesus' rule in praying for their persecutors and not seeking to hit back.

And, in and through it all, the early Christians were radically counter-cultural in the deepest way, because they didn't worship the gods that were on every corner and in every hearth and home. They didn't worship Mars or Mammon or Aphrodite – or Caesar; and that made them instantly suspect. They worshipped the One God of Creation, the God of Abraham, the God who had become human in and as Jesus. This gave them a new-creational identity which quickly spilled over into new art forms, new poems, new songs, and before too long new iconography.

For all this, they were therefore regarded as dangerous subversives, letting the side down socially, culturally and politically."

Tom Wright