

ORDER OF SERVICE

Sunday 16 May 2021

Welcome and Notices
Mr Keith Ferres, Session Clerk

Hymn 564
Guide me

Prayer of Invocation

Young at Heart
Christine Bradbeer

Bible Reading: Acts 6:8-15
Loris Balderson

Hymn 134
Look ye saints, the sight is glorious

Sermon: Acts #5
Stephen's testimony

Prayer of Intercession
and
The Lord's Prayer

Hymn 549
Lord, it belongs not to my care

Benediction



NOTICES

16 May 2021

Website: www.blackburnpc.org.au

Wednesday 19 May 1.30 pm Prayer Meeting.
Sunday 23 May 11 am Divine Service. Acts #6
All Welcome Covid safe practices.

NB 17-21 May 7.30 pm daily. One Heart Whitehorse Churches Care:
Register here <https://form.jotform.com/210877739057871>

For your prayers this week

Congregational member: Barbara Martin

and



Motor and Julia YAT are with APWM working with Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia. Pray for their health, financial support and also peace in South Sudan.



GARDENIA ST

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

53 Gardenia Street,
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WELCOME

GARDENIA ST.
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BLACKBURN

16 May 2021



The Stoning of Saint Stephen
detail, Rembrandt, 1625,
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon
(Inset-full image)

For Your Prayers



The armed conflict between the so-called al-Shabaab and government forces created a humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado (a northern province). By the end of the year, over 500,000 people were internally displaced, and more than 700,000 needed humanitarian assistance. The government failed to provide shelter, food, water, education or health services and many people relied on the goodwill of local families to give them shelter in Cabo Delgado and the neighbouring provinces of Nampula and Niassa.

Amnesty International 2020

Christians face extreme violence in the northern part of the country. Christians have been forced to flee their homes. Islamic extremists have looted and destroyed many Christian places of worship, Christian schools and businesses owned by Christians. Christian aid workers were also targeted. Because of this, it is difficult for Christians to gather—either inside or outside of churches—and it can be risky for believers to speak against persecution.

In the northern part of the country where Muslims are the majority, converts face extreme pressure to renounce their faith. If they refuse, they will usually be shunned. In April, a jihadist group with possible ties to Islamic State killed 52 people, burned down churches and institutions and attacked villages.

Open Doors USA 2020

The testimony of STEPHEN

Sermon Notes

How often did I sing of the Bohemian monarch, 'Good king Wenceslas' and never thought about the feast of Stephen?

Whatever the date, we need to think today about Stephen's crowning act of witness to Jesus recounted in Acts 7. Luke tells us it came about like this...

1. An accusation (6:8-15)

Stephen was one of the seven men selected to ensure the Greek speaking widows were not overlooked in the daily distribution of funds.

He had shared in experiencing the Holy Spirit gifts and performed 'miracles and wonders' (6:8) which were having a powerful local impact.

This provoked some of the Jews present who were not able to refute his message. From a theological discussion this ramped up into slander. Then violence. They took him to the Sanhedrin claiming he had (i) spoken against the temple, and (ii) against the law of Moses.

2. Stephen's defence (7:1-49)

Stephen's defence speech is the longest in Acts. In it he highlights Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David and Solomon. He draws

primarily on the books of Moses. In this way he builds his case using "the Law of Moses".

The temple doesn't come into the narrative until David and Solomon. This makes the point that God-was-with-his-people before the temple was built!

A point Luke later builds on (Acts 14:27, 15:12)

Then Stephen accuses his attackers of being like their ancestors, whom the prophets Amos and Isaiah criticised.

3. Stephen's death (7:51-60)

Stephen is radiant with the glory of God, but the Sanhedrin is enraged. He is cast out and the mob stone him to death. With a vision of the glory he utters two Christ-like prayers. The first Christian martyr.

The attack on Stephen challenges us at many levels. Where are we in the picture? Change is painful. Could we preserve our buildings and traditions too highly?

God has bound himself to his *people*, and our traditions are ephemeral, it is the *Scriptures*, that will not pass away.

Christine and I will be taking a four week break from Wednesday 9th June. In the 1970s we ministered in Armidale NSW. Today we have friends from those times in various locations in NSW - mostly coastal locations! Our plan is a road trip to visit old friends.



In our absence I have asked the Rev Dr Greg Goswell to look after pulpit supply. Greg is the Academic Dean at Christ College, the Presbyterian Theological College in Sydney. Greg and Mignon have enjoyed fellowship at BPC previously (most recently in 2019) and I am sure you will make them both feel welcome.

For any critical pastoral support please contact the Rev Bob Thomas who has kindly agreed to make himself available. His contact number is 0417 592 646.