



# Church in a Bag

## Sunday 14 March

Dubbo Uniting Church



### A Gathering

We may not all be gathered in the same building  
but at this time, when we need each other so much  
we are invited to worship together  
from where we are  
knowing that God can hear us all  
and can blend even distant voices  
across Dubbo and beyond into worship.  
For God so loved the world, with the love of a Creator.  
For God so loved the world, with the love of a Redeemer.  
For God so loved the world, with a love that lasts forever.

### Preparation

As we approached Easter 2020, there was a lot of comment on social media about how we were experiencing the “Lentiest Lent ever”! Who would have imagined that we would still be in the grip of a pandemic this year too, although at least the presence of a vaccine has become a realised hope?



For God so loved the world ...



This is the fourth Sunday in Lent and the gospel reading this week may be one of the best-known passages in all the gospels. John 3:16 is often quoted and upheld as a call to salvation. How might we use its familiarity as a comfort in difficult times – proclaiming the notion that ‘God so loved the world’, words that need to be spoken and heard especially today.

## Reading: John 3:14–21

### Reflection

This reading is part of a conversation Jesus was having with Nicodemus, and we see in the to and fro of questions and answers that there are two very different understandings of the nature of things at play. Nicodemus is very literal and bounded to what he knows on earth. Jesus sees a vastly bigger picture incorporating the spiritual dimension of life (and eternity) that Nicodemus struggles to grasp.

The reference to Moses harks back to the healing presence of God symbolised by the raising of the bronze snake on a pole (albeit after the Lord had inflicted venomous snakes on the people in the first place for their moaning!), but the reference here in John points readers to understanding the significance of the cross and the crucifixion as something that can be seen as a moment of exaltation. And in the midst of this we have the famous verse 16, often described as the gospel in miniature as it brings together an understanding of the death of Jesus, and the love of God and all of humanity.



Rob Bell's book called "Love Wins" took a position, shared with many, it has to be said, that takes the grace of God very seriously, and ultimately, as the title suggests, emphasises that the love of God will win out over all that would attempt to knock down and destroy what is loving. In human terms, that means that God keeps the door open to all creatures to respond for as long as is possible.

In John's gospel, which proclaims God's love for all the world, we see that how we respond to that love is determinative, not an arbitrary predetermined decision of God. So what does this mean for how we see others, even those who may be ambivalent or hostile towards God? What does it mean for our sense of mission and outreach? This vision of God is far removed from pictures of an angry and vengeful God ready to condemn a sinful world. What impact does this have on our lives as living witnesses to the love and grace of God?

## A Prayer

God when we are tempted to put others down  
when we are tempted to dismiss your loved ones  
when we are tempted to write others off  
give us your eyes for seeing how lovely are all  
whom you have created  
give us your eyes to see beyond the grime that daily life has deposited  
give us your eyes that penetrate the darkness  
give us your eyes to see best how we can raise up all whom you love.  
In this fellowship and in our community  
and so into all the world  
may we look with those eyes of love prepared to build up  
rather than tear down  
ready to penetrate the darkness and find the light  
and, in drawing others to you  
come to know ourselves  
beloved of God, Creator, Redeemer, Friend  
**Amen.**



## A song to sing or to read: Praise the one who breaks the darkness

Praise the One who break the darkness  
with a liberating light.

Praise the One who frees the prisoners  
turning blindness into sight.

Praise the One who preached the Gospel  
healing every dread disease.

Calming storms and feeding thousands  
with the very bread of peace.

Praise the One who blessed the children  
with a strong yet gentle word.

Praise the One who drove out demons  
with a piercing two-edged sword.

Praise the one who brings cool water  
to the desert's burning sand.

From this well comes living water  
quenching thirst in every land.

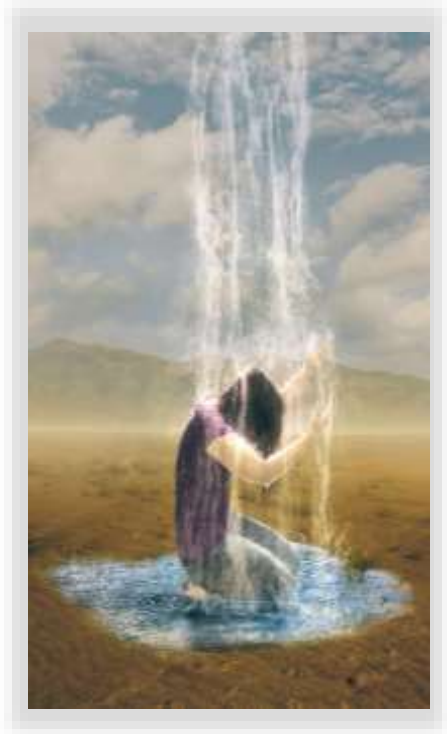
Praise the one true love incarnate  
Christ who suffered in our place.

Jesus died and rose for many  
that we may know God by grace.

Let us sing for joy and gladness  
seeing what our God has done.

Praise the one redeeming glory,  
praise the One who makes us one.

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## Closing Prayer

In our Lenten journey may our hope be longer than the journey, our faith, deeper than all darkness, our love, bolder than every lie, and God's story of salvation more than a cross. And may God, the creator of all life, Jesus Christ, the source of eternal life, and the Holy Spirit, the power in each and every life, bless you, this day and every day. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen**

**With thanks to Rev Mel Graham for preparing today's reflection**



Dubbo Uniting Church 64-66 Church Street Dubbo NSW 2830  
p: 68854200 e: [dubbouca@bigpond.com](mailto:dubbouca@bigpond.com) w: [dubbo.uca.org.au](http://dubbo.uca.org.au)