

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

EASTER 5

2ND MAY



The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch – Ethiopian icon

WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

God is love,
and those who abide in love abide in God,
and God abides in them.

1 John 4. 16

Prayer

In peace, as people of the light,
let us pray to the Lord:
Into your communion, Lord, gather all creation.

Joining our voices
with the deep sighs of creation
yearning for redemption;
with sun, moon and stars,
tree and plain, desert and bush;
the sea and its inhabitants,
with all creatures wild and tame,
let us pray to the Lord:
Into your communion, Lord, gather all creation.

For the Bunn Wurrung people,
who came first to this place;
and for all faithful custodians of the earth,
let us pray to the Lord:
Into your communion, Lord, gather all creation.

For all who share life with others:
for parents and carers,
teachers, artists, healers,
peacemakers and reconcilers,
and those who seek to renew the face of the earth;
let us pray to the Lord:
Into your communion, Lord, gather all creation.

For those who complete the afflictions of Christ,
whose suffering seems without end:
who lack food, shelter, work and dignity,
and suffer the violence of the proud;
for all who cry for justice day and night,
let us pray to the Lord:

Into your communion, Lord, gather all creation.

For all in authority:
those who require wisdom and restraint,
and all who serve those in need,
keeping them from harm;
let us pray to the Lord:

Into your communion, Lord, gather all creation.

With the whole Church,
from *this place* to the ends of the earth;
with each one gathered here in prayer,
with absent brothers and sisters,
that we may be renewed in the faith of Christ,
let us pray to the Lord:

Into your communion, Lord, gather all creation.

With God's faithful servants of every time and place,
with apostles, prophets, saints and martyrs,
with all who have gone before,
who inspire, guide and encourage us,
let us pray to the Lord:

Into your communion, Lord, gather all creation.

Confession

O God, you search us out and know us,
and all that we are is open to you.
We confess that we have sinned.

We use our power to dominate
and our weaknesses to manipulate:

We evade responsibility
and fail to confront evil:

We are seduced by fashionable dreams
and pursue our desires at the expense of others:

We despair of changing the world
and neglect to change even ourselves:

We fail to integrate spirit and flesh
and forfeit our wholeness and dignity:

Kyrie Eleison

Lord, have mercy,
Christ, have mercy,
Lord, have mercy.

We turn to you,
O God of infinite mercy;
we renounce evil;
we claim your love;
we desire to be made whole.

Prune us, O God,
Cut from us all that saps your divine life,
That we may blossom and flourish
And be fruitful
In the pattern of Jesus,
Your true vine. **Amen**

Kyrie eleison:

'Lord, have mercy' 'Lord, you
are the merciful one' The *Kyrie
eleison* appears in early
Greek liturgies, and in the
West from the 5th century

Acts of the Apostles 8. 26-40

Two weeks ago, we read the story of the man who was born lame [Acts 3] and who was brought to the temple gate each day in order that he could beg. Throughout the entire 40 years of his life, this man was prohibited from entering the temple because a law from the Book of Leviticus [21] prevented him, which I quoted in my reflection:

No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, one who is blind or lame ... [amongst others],

But Peter and John raised the lame man up, enabling him to enter the temple for the first time, singing and dancing. When I quoted this extract, I left a bit out, partly because it was not relevant, partly to protect your sensibilities. The law continues:

... For one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. ... he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. ... he shall not come near the curtain or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries;

This passage we read now from the Acts of the Apostles immediately follows a section where Peter and John have been preaching and ministering to the Samaritans. As we know from the parable we call the Good Samaritan, these were ancient cousins who were despised by Judeans. The relationship between Judeans in the south and Samaritans in the north was like a longstanding family feud, where old stories and animosities prevailed and kept them apart. But Peter and John have been ministering to the Samaritans as though these ancient animosities have been wiped away.

We now read the story of the Ethiopian eunuch – a man with “crushed” testicles. He is a devout man who has been to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. But, he would not, like the

lame man, have been permitted in the temple. So here we have three stories: the healing of the lame man and his joyful entry into the presence of God, the reconciliation between Jews and Samaritans and now the entry of the despised foreigner into the household of God. The eunuch asks: 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?'

And so, the disciples discover that the reach of God goes to the ends of the earth.

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.'



Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch – Menologion of Basil II (1000 CE)

The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Epistle 1 John 4. 7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

The Gospel of John 15. 1-8

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Reflecting

The Gospel of John is a deeply mystical text. Maybe chapter 15 – I am the true vine - is the most profoundly mystical of the whole of the Gospel in the way in which it invites us into the mystery of the presence of God, a mystery not only infusing our whole world, but indeed, human lives.

Too many of us were raised and have lived with a sense of God “out there”, somewhere; but never within. The degraded sense of self that we were given, either by parents and authority figures, or by desiccated theology have denied us the freedom of living into this mystery. This image of mutual abiding is not about believing things, rather living; every day, living into the mystery of God within. What a joy this invitation to mutual indwelling is! Nevertheless, this abiding in Christ does involve pain; cutting back so that we might ‘bear much fruit’.

I come from a family of gardeners and pruning was an essential part of confident and creative gardening. When the time is right for going in with pruning saw and secateurs, don’t hold back was what I learnt. But the time must be right. To prune at the wrong time, in the wrong season, will only risk the fruitfulness and, possibly, the life of the plant. It never ceases to amaze me how a good prune will revive and reshape a plant’s fruitfulness. In Autumn of 2020 I cut back two fig trees in my garden very hard. I feared I had done too much. But the previous year there had been no fruit at all. This year there was almost too much.

Jesus’ organic metaphor of the life of the vine resonates with the inner reality of our souls. A rampant, untrained vine is a pointless thing, without shape, without purpose, without fruit. What is the point of such a plant? Likewise with a human soul.

The post-WWII ethic with which we were raised, and upon which we have been encouraged to base our own and our children’s lives, has been one of endless growth. We have come to expect that we can have it all – and that a cutting back is some kind of affront to our power and the control of our destiny. But this growth has been rampant, even cancerous in its unchecked progress. Our politicians speak to us as though this endless growth is our right and we should expect it.

In Christ, though, we are called to a downward way which leads to life. That while we might enjoy prosperities of all kinds by virtue of the country we live in, these are not what make us; these are not the source of meaning in our lives. In Christ we are called to a secret, hidden life where we abide in Christ from whom we receive the sap which enables us to be fruitful in the same manner as that one into whom we are grafted.

So may we give thanks for the pruning when it comes. May we trust the one who cuts us back – in whatever way the pruning comes to us, may we give ourselves to the cuts, knowing that in due season we will again sprout, and blossom and bear the fruit of the kingdom.

When our hearts are wintry,
grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us
back to life again
fields of our hearts
that dead and bare have been:

*Love has come again,
like wheat that springs up green.*

John Macleod Campbell Crum, 1872-1958 *alt.*

Prayers of the people

prepared by Ron Townsend

Jesus said, *'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.'* Let us now approach Jesus the Lord, with confidence.

Risen Lord, you came as a sacrifice for our sin. Give us faith to accept this act of love, so that we turn from all human efforts and drink in the atoning righteousness of your death and resurrection.

God of love, in your mercy . . . **hear our prayer.**

Risen Lord, you are the true vine and we are the branches. By your Spirit, produce the fruit of love, joy, peace, and patience in your Body the church and in all its members, for others to taste and enjoy. Keep us from hanging on to your love for ourselves. Prune all selfishness from us and fill us with your love: a love which builds up the life of our families, church communities, friends and others we meet in our daily life – a love which reaches out to embrace the hungry, the homeless and those without work. By your love enable the whole of our community to live as sisters and brothers, truly reflecting that same love.

God of love, in your mercy . . . **hear our prayer.**

Risen Lord, have mercy on your earth and supply its needs. Where people are hungry, give food. Where people are in distress, comfort them. Where people are in trouble, bring order and peace. And turn the whole world to you in faith, repentance and praise. We pray especially for peace between nations, and for a just and equitable sharing of the earth's resources – including the sharing of COVID-19 vaccines with poorer nations, by those who have plenty, like Australia.

God of love, in your mercy . . . **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus Christ, focus our love on people we know with special needs. Heal those who are unwell, console the sorrowing, satisfy the hungry, comfort the lonely and sad, and stand with those in grief or despair. Today we especially remember some of the older members of our congregation, who are unable to attend worship because of their infirmities. We also acknowledge the many others in need, whom we now name silently in our hearts . . . (brief silence)

God of love, in your mercy . . . **hear our prayer.**

Thank you, Jesus, for hearing us and caring for us in all our needs. We ask that you will intercede, unceasingly, for us before our heavenly Father, and open our eyes that we may see him through you.

Lord, we would grow with you and bring forth fruit that is pleasing to you; fed by your living water, giving sustenance to others. Lord, we would grow with you.

We ask all this in your holy name, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

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 for ever. Amen.

Blessing

Jesus says:

Abide in me as I abide in you.
Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself
unless it abides in the vine,
neither can you unless you abide in me.
I am the vine, you are the branches.
Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit,

Abide in God's love.

Prayers adapted from

[Discipleship Ministries | Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B - Liturgical... \(umcdiscipleship.org\)](#)

Including: *From the Lutheran Church of Australia's Worship Planning Page (revised slightly).*

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NEWS AND NOTICES

MORNING TEA (COVID-SAFE STYLE) IS BACK

Morning tea looks a bit different

After the service please make your way to the morning tea room and:

- Collect your own cuppa from the servery. It will be poured by the servers and they will add your milk and sugar.
- Take your own cup to the dishwasher tray, empty any dregs into the jug and place your cup upside down in the tray and put any rubbish in the bin.
- Food will be served to you by servers wearing gloves and using tongs.
- Please don't assist anyone else - the servers will do this.

Thanks to everyone for helping keep us safe.

Robyn & Dianne

ROSTER for Sunday 9 May 2021

READING	Lisa Saffin	
PRAYERS	Brenda Grootendorst	
DOOR DUTY	Graeme Davenport	Marg Davis
SOUND	Robyn Mulder	
COUNTING	Dennis Taylor	Jan Davenport
MORNING TEA	Susie Fergusson	Lisa Saffin
RESOURCES DELIVERY (7 May 2021)	Heather Baxter	