

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

Pentecost 14

August 29



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.

... those who look into the perfect law,
the law of liberty, and persevere,
being not hearers who forget but doers who act
- they will be blessed in their doing.

James 1

Prayer

God of all truth, we give thanks for your faithful utterance of reality.

In your truthfulness, you have called the world very good.

In your truthfulness, you have promised, *I have loved you with an everlasting love.*

In your truthfulness, you have assured, *this is my beloved Son.*

In your truthfulness, you voiced, *Fear not, I am with you.*

In your truthfulness, you have guaranteed that, *nothing shall separate us from your love in Jesus Christ.*

It is by your truthfulness that we love.

And yet, we live in world which is phony deep down
in which we participate with a slant.

Ours is a seduced world,
Where we call evil good and good evil,
Where we put darkness for light and light for darkness,
Where we call bitter sweet and sweet bitter
Where we call war peace and peace war,
So that we rarely see the truth of the matter.

Give us courage to depart the pretend world of euphemism,
To call things by their right name,
To use things for their right use,
To love our neighbour as you love us.

Overwhelm our fearful need to distort,
That we may fall back into your truth-telling about us,
That we may be tellers of truth and its practitioners.

We pray in the name of the One you have filled
With grace and truth,
Jesus, your anointed One. Amen

O, for a thousand tongues to sing

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of our God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
such music in the sinner's ears
is life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean,
his blood availed for me.

He speaks, and listening to his voice
new life the dead receive,
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
the humble poor believe.

Hear him, you deaf; his praise, you dumb,
your loosened tongues employ;
you blind, behold your Saviour come;
and leap, you lame, for joy!

My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.

Charles Wesley
1707-88 *alt.*

The letter of James 1. 17-27

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore, rid yourselves of all

sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.



Kathe Kollwitz, Mothers, 1919

The Gospel according to Mark 7. 1-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' He said

to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,
"This people honours me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines."
You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

Then he said to them, 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, "Honour your father and your mother"; and, "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die." But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban" (that is, an offering to God)— then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.'

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.'



When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?' (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

Blest are the pure in heart

Blest are the pure in heart,
for they shall see our God;
the secret of the Lord is theirs,
their soul is Christ's abode.

The Lord who left the heavens
our life and peace to bring,
to dwell with us in lowliness,
our pattern and our King:

still to the lowly soul
he will himself impart,
and for his cradle and his throne
chooses the pure in heart.

Lord, we your presence seek;
this blessing now renew:
give us a pure and lowly heart,
a temple fit for you.

John Keble
1792-1866
(vv.1,3) and others

Reflecting

In the early 1980s Chris and I were involved in a local, ecumenical refugee settlement scheme. This scheme of local organisations, often churches, settling and helping to integrate indo-Chinese families into Australian life, was an initiative of the Fraser government. Together, as a motley crew of local Heidelberg church people, we helped settle three families – finding them housing, helping the parents get work and education for the children, introducing them to the health care system and navigate immigration and other government issues. Although it was intense work, it was a joy to do and to connect with these people and see them set down roots in Australia. It made our hearts bigger.

In about 2003 we gathered with one of the families to celebrate 20 years for them in Australia – their life here and all they had been able to achieve. During the night the father made a complaint to me about queue jumpers – desperate people coming to Australia by boat, fleeing brutal regimes, torture and the risk of death for them and their families. I was shocked by our friend's comment. Hadn't he and his family benefitted, indeed been saved, by the hospitality, generosity and welcome of the whole Australian nation, from the Federal government down to the little local committee, scratching stuff together so they could put a new life together? I was flabbergasted – and I have to say a bit offended that a limit in his mind had been placed around our hospitality. *I was happy to receive your hospitality, but others shouldn't now get it*, was the implication. How quickly we can forget.

But this anniversary celebration took place after Tampa, when everything to do with refugees and asylum seekers coming to Australia changed. Our friend Tran Chi Nyang – a boat person - had swallowed the bile being promoted at the time.

This week marked 20 years since Tampa and there has been a certain amount of reflection going on in the press of who we as a nation have become since then. Unfortunately, though, it has been overshadowed by the daily diet of COVID news and the catastrophe which is Afghanistan.

There is, though, a connection – a hard wired connection - between the Tampa and the subsequent refugee policy of offshore detention and what has unfolded in the last week in Afghanistan. Waleed Ally helpfully analysed the connection in Friday's Age.

Tampa was the moment that has determined our asylum seeker policies ever since [2001], especially our brutal practice of indefinite, offshore detention. This we did to people fleeing the very same Taliban we were bombing. Now we look back upon that moment from a COVID detention of our own, with the Taliban freshly returned to power. And through all that, one constant persists: our almost radical lack of empathy.

That's most obvious in the Tampa case. It's not merely that the Howard government sent out the military in unprecedented fashion to keep the Tampa out of our waters. It's the vast demonisation campaign that supported this. These people were "illegal immigrants" and "queue jumpers", who may well be terrorists.



Asylum seekers on the deck of The Tampa - ABC

Within about six weeks, the government had graduated from smears to bald untruths: falsely claiming some asylum seekers had thrown their children overboard as a way of forcing us to rescue them so they could claim refugee status. "I don't want in Australia people who would throw their own children in to the sea," declared John Howard, assigning these people a cynical immorality. But there's no denying where the cynicism truly lay.

These asylum seekers had ceased to be people. They had simply become a means. Faceless and unable to answer back, they became a blank canvas. We could conjure whatever portrait of them suited the political moment.

The September 11 attacks [the month after the Tampa] were fresh, we had a war of good-and-evil to prosecute, so the rhetoric of evil came to surround them. Their life-and-death plight was irrelevant. What mattered is how their existence could be mobilised for our purposes.

In today's gospel the Pharisees and scribes have come from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee, probably somewhere around the city of Capernaum at the north end of the lake, to check up on Jesus. This is not just a day's outing. It's a 160km walk, 100 miles, a five-to-six-day walk. You need to be determined about something to make such a journey. They wanted to check up on Jesus and they are eager to find some fault with his ministry to the common people of the Galilee – people, Mark tells us, like sheep without a shepherd.

The disciples' hands are not clean – ritually not clean, that is. This is not about hygiene but about ritual purity – maybe it was a hygiene regulation a long time before – but in this case it's not. People who were ritually unclean were outside what the scribes and Pharisees saw as the pure Israel, they were beyond the pale. This tradition, as Jesus calls it, was a way of controlling people, of mobilising their fear and anxiety about their very being; condemning them to a status of unclean, unacceptable if they didn't fall into line.

The strangeness of some of these purity codes is quite alarming: fruit that had been picked and was to be given to the temple as a tithe needed to be separated at harvest. If the fruit for the tithe was mixed with fruit for general consumption, the tithe fruit was considered to be unclean. Seed which was sown on the Sabbath was also considered to be unclean, so not suitable for tithing to the temple. How could the 97% of the population who lived in poverty find lives of dignity and security with such requirements hanging over them? But as the biblical commentator Ched Myers suggests, the Jewish people were captive to this elitist concept of purity; captive to a rhetoric and a system which espoused an ethnic and national purity based on persnickitiness.

The truth is that only a wealthy and influential few could maintain this level of purity, the rest were relegated to the existential status of unclean.

During the years around Tampa a new word entered the Australian lexicon – *unAustralian*. The kind of people we want in Australia, who deserve to be Australian don't jump queues, they enter legally. The kind of people we want in Australia don't throw their children overboard. We failed to recognise and to push back against this lie – failed to remind ourselves that white Australia was founded on the backs of criminals, that so many people jumped queues and climbed through barbed wire fences and paid bribes and risked life crossing the borders of the countries of their birth to make their way to freedom in this place. We let the lie take root in our souls and our self-imagination. And as a friend of mine says, the Australian people have been debauched by this lie. The elitist notion of Australian purity has prospered and in that prospering we have accepted the illegality of our offshore detention gulag and the slow and determined torture of people already traumatised by war and torture in the name of our national purity. And election after election since 2001 we have elected and re-elected governments which have promoted and funded this moral aberration.

Jesus says to the crowds around him: *Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.*' We might say to ourselves as Australians, there is no one from outside Australia who by coming into the country can defile our Australian identity – we know this to be true. What a hotch-potch of nationalities and races and degrees of moral rectitude we are? But we have been debauched, we have been defiled by all that has been spoken and taken place in our name since Tampa.

The language of the Letter of James is often uncompromising. We are left in no doubt about what it means to live lives in the pattern of Jesus: *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

I find it distressing that we seem to have lost the ability to have public dialogue in Australia that has some kind of moral purchase; ethical dialogue which results in changes in government policy and the way we do things. Nevertheless, while this dialogue space has been closed down, we are still called to continue to live in the pattern of Jesus, to shine the light, to be salt in the dish, to call our communities to the values we claim that we espouse. And we are called to tend the wounds of those who have been ground down both in their own countries of origin and now here. James writes: *those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.*

We live with joy under this law of liberty granted to us by Jesus. We are free to not be defiled and debauched by the murder and avarice wrought against innocents, we are free to not be caught up in wickedness and deceit, to prosper by slander and folly in our name. It's not that we are better, but that we are free under that law of liberty. Yet, as we heard last week from Ephesians, we are engaged in a battle. So may we wrestle with courage and compassion, being gentle as doves and cunning as serpents as we keep alive the good news that the life of God breaks through a culture of death – setting us free to be children of God, heirs and joint-heirs with Christ.

Prayer

We pray to the God who welcomes and provides for all,
who hears our prayers and in whose image we are all made.

We pray for the Church: may we all, through our disposition and our actions, have a deep awareness of Christ in the other and may we grow in our openness and hospitality to the other.
God of grace; hear our prayer.

We pray for refugees: may God's eternal and compassionate presence
give them comfort in their insecurity, peace in their distress and hope in their desolation.
God of grace; **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who live in this land of Australia: may we live justly and peacefully alongside one another, assisting each other to be all that God created us to be and rejoicing as the children of God in our diversity.
God of grace; **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our world, especially the people of Afghanistan: may we expand our capacity for holding our possessions lightly and our passion for justice and peace strongly.
God of grace; **hear our prayer.**

God of all creation, hear our prayers and send your blessing on all people, especially those who are suffering in any way. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ who came as brother and servant to all. **Amen**

Jesus Christ is waiting

Jesus Christ is waiting,
waiting in the streets;
no-one is his neighbour,
all alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely too.
Make me, friend or stranger,
fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is raging,
raging in the streets,
where injustice spirals
and real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry too.
In the Kingdom's causes
let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is healing,
healing in the streets;
curing those who suffer,
touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity too.
Let my care be active,
healing just like you.

Jesus Christ is dancing,
dancing in the streets,
where each sign of hatred
he, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph too.
Where good conquers evil
let me dance with you.

Jesus Christ is calling,
calling in the streets,
'Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet.'
Listen, Lord Jesus,
let my fears be few.
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.

Blessing

Teach us, dear Lord, to number our days;
That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.
Oh, satisfy us early with Thy mercy,
That we may rejoice and be glad all of our days.
And the beauty of our Lord be upon us;
And establish Thou the work of our hands.
And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us;
And establish Thou the work of our hands, dear Lord.

Let nothing disturb thee,
Nothing affright thee;
All things are passing,
God never changeth!
Patient endurance attaineth all things;
Who God possesseth
In nothing is wanting;
Alone God sufficeth.

In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Blessing from: Celtic Daily Prayer, The Northumbria Community, William Collins

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NEWS AND NOTICES

AFTER WORSHIP CHAT – ZOOM LINK emailed

For those wishing to catch up after this Sunday's worship service, there will be an opportunity to stay online to chat afterwards on **Sunday 29th August 11.00am to 12.00pm**. Zoom Link is being emailed to the congregation today (Friday).

GENEROUS GIFT TOWARDS SUPERMARKET VOUCHER SCHEME

Over the past couple of months, Aston Comms contractors have been changing over the phone tower equipment, both on the tower above the church and on the ground. This has been in preparation for demolition of the North Road Hall. To date the TELSTRA equipment has been located under the hall. There have been many contractors coming and going and while the work has at times been disruptive, they have been a pleasure to work with.

Recently, as a sign of appreciation for the work the congregation does through the Little Free Pantry and with Asylum Seekers, they gave us supermarket vouchers to the value of \$1,000. We were wowed by their generosity and this vote of thanks for the work the congregation does in these two areas.

ADELPHI PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY

The performance dates for the play – “The Christian Brothers” unfortunately yet again need to be postponed due to the restrictions currently in place. More information will follow regarding revised dates which we hope can be held at the end of October 2021.

Reminder re update to Church Office contact details

Church Office Phone: [0411 958 127](tel:0411958127)

Minister – new work email contact (Rev. Andrew Boyle): ajmboyle@outlook.com

Note: Any general queries can still be directed to the office email which remains the same: office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au



AFGHANISTAN EMERGENCY (ACT FOR PEACE)

By now, you will have seen the heartbreaking scenes unfolding in Afghanistan.

In the recent days and weeks, Taliban forces have taken control of all Afghanistan's major cities, including Kabul, after rapid advances. Almost 390,000 people have been displaced, and tens of thousands now need urgent humanitarian assistance. They are in crisis.

Families hurriedly left their homes, without time to bring essential items with them. They're now in cramped, unsanitary camps that lack even the most basic medical and water facilities.

Click here for [Donation page if wishing to help](#) (Ctrl key plus click link)

ROSTER for Sunday 5 September 2021

(pending Victorian restrictions regarding worship services). If unable to gather face to face, worship will be by Zoom.

READING	Heather Baxter	
PRAYERS	Warwick Barry	
COMMUNION	Karen Roberts	
EARLY WORD	Marg Davis	
DOOR DUTY	Gary Richter	Dianne Richter
SOUND	Nev Parker	
COUNTING	Marg Davis	TBA
MUSIC	Peter Hurley	
FLOWERS	Lorraine Denniston	Lynne Parker
RESOURCES DELIVERY (Fri 3 Sep)	Warwick Barry	