

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

Season of Creation 5

3rd October

St Francis of Assisi



Francis and the Birds, Giotto di Bondonne

WORSHIP AT HOME

We come to the last Sunday of the Season of Creation when we mark the life of St Francis of Assisi. He lived in the 12th and 13th centuries in Italy and was born into a noble family and pursued a military life. But a vision changed the course of his life and he devoted himself to reviving the church in the pattern of Jesus' own radical humility and poverty. He had a profound sense of the presence of God in all things, maybe best remembered in the Canticle of St Francis.

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.

Prove me, O Lord, and try me;
test my heart and mind.
For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.

Psalm 26

Prayer

Almighty and all-embracing God, the origin of all that is,
and life giver to all in nature and the universe.
You create out of love, and in your wisdom made us a family,
a household dependent on each other for the welfare of the whole.
The lilies of the valleys you enriched with colours,
you provide food for the birds of the air,
the locusts and the flies are not forgotten.

And you satisfy the needs of humanity from the abundance of your stores.
We plead for forgiveness of our selfish and careless use of your creation.
We are trapped in the nets of our own greed,
ensnared by the traps of power,
and our continued search for status.
We have neglected your creation because we have neglected you our God,
and your creation is crying out for help.

Lord of creation look favourably upon us and forgive us.
Breathe new life into us and all of your creation,
let your Holy Spirit lead us in the call of this Season of Creation,
that we may renew our relationship with all things and each other.

Fill our hearts with you love,
encourage us with your grace and empower us with your wisdom,
that we may equally share your resources

and equally accountable for the welfare of the whole universe.
That we may live together in an Eden of harmony and peace.

In the name of Him who came, is coming,
and will continue to come, to restore, to revive, and to save
– Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Job 1. 1, 2. 1-10

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.
That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord,
and Ha-Satan [The Accuser] also came among them to present himself before the Lord.

The Lord said to Ha-Satan, 'Where have you come from?'

Ha-Satan answered the Lord, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.'

The Lord said to Ha-Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.'

Then Ha-Satan answered the Lord, 'Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.'



Job – 2, Oldřich Kulhanek

The Lord said to Ha-Satan 'Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.'

So Ha-Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself and sat among the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.'

But he said to her, 'You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?'

In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Psalm 26

Vindicate me, O Lord,
for I have walked in my integrity,
and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.

Prove me, O Lord, and try me;
test my heart and mind.

For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.

I do not sit with the worthless,
nor do I consort with hypocrites;
I hate the company of evildoers,
and will not sit with the wicked.

I wash my hands in innocence,
and go around your altar, O Lord,
singing aloud a song of thanksgiving,
and telling all your wondrous deeds.

O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell,
and the place where your glory abides.
Do not sweep me away with sinners,
nor my life with the bloodthirsty,
those in whose hands are evil devices,
and whose right hands are full of bribes.

But as for me, I walk in my integrity;
redeem me, and be gracious to me.
My foot stands on level ground;
in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.

The letter to the Hebrews 1. 1-4

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being,

and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The Gospel according to Mark 10. 2-16

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.' But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'



People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Reflecting

A few years ago, Chris and I went to the unveiling of the headstone on the grave of the mother of a Jewish friend. The unveiling of the headstone usually takes place in the twelfth month after the death of the family member. At this one-year anniversary of a death Jews gather at the grave to offer prayers, read psalms and to speak of their loved-one; to give thanks and to remember. The Rabbi who was present was Aviva Kippen, formerly the Rabbi of the Etz Chayim synagogue in East Bentleigh. As she led us, she began by saying that each of us have our own particular fantasy about what happens after death. Our own particular fantasy ...? I was rocked back on my feet. What a provocative term, I thought. And then she began to outline some of our various “fantasies” about the afterlife. In truth it was the right word – given that there are so many of them. There were Jews, Christians, a Buddhist and people who didn’t subscribe to any belief system present on this morning at the Jewish cemetery in Springvale. We all had our own particular fantasies, and none. While Christians might choose to disparage the life-after-death conceptions of other religions, we have to acknowledge our own is simply another human fantasy. Maybe fantasy is too strong a word. Maybe imagines might be less provocative term. Nevertheless, this is something none of us can prove in some definitive way.

The book of Job begins with a fantasy about the way in which heaven works. *One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and ha-Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord.* What the book of Job offers us is a way of imagining the other-than-human realm. There is the Lord and then there are heavenly beings who seem to act as sort of consultative council. And there is a character ha-Satan [the Accuser] who plays the role of some kind of public prosecutor who is also part of the picture; part of the workings of this heavenly council. Is this the way it really is? Of course not. But the writers of Job – and there were multiple writers – imagine it this way to explore questions of the nature of God and God’s relationship to the world and the question of human suffering.

Job lives a devout and honourable life. We are told his is *a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity.* The Accuser has his way with Job and inflicts untold suffering on him – firstly he loses his health and then everything he treasures and has built. His wife provokes him to embrace hopelessness and to curse God and die. In the ensuing long chapters of the book three pious friends remonstrate with Job and question him about what he has done wrong which would bring such suffering upon him. In the end Job himself becomes the accuser and drags God into the courtroom and remonstrates with God as to why such a universe has been made where meaningless suffering can descend upon people, even on blameless and upright people. In the end God defends himself, asking where was Job when the earth was created and the mystery of the world was established. Job is silent before this knowledge. We will hear more from Job over the next few weeks.

The question the book of Job struggles with is, is there some kind of moral meaning behind the universe and the events which humans find themselves caught up in. Is there some meaning behind what takes place? Is there meaning behind our suffering? The question is wrestled with in the famous book: Why bad things happen to good people. One of the ways we fantasise about the world is that the world is a struggle between the forces of Good and Evil. The world of Good and Evil is a dualistic world and humans, whether we like it or not, get caught up in this struggle, goes the fantasy. This is the position that Job’s three friends take. Job must have done something evil for him to be punished with such suffering, goes their reasoning. They cannot see the world in any other way and through chapter after chapter in the book, they persist with unrelenting zeal in their questioning. This is the world of punishments and rewards. And if we

imagine the world in this way, this is the world we create. We also take it upon ourselves to dish out punishments and rewards. And we say that people get their just dessert. In the name of God we say this – at least under our breath, if not out loud. We tell ourselves we can say such a thing because we know the difference between good and evil. We have eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, we know!

Francis of Assisi embodied another way of imagining the world. A non-dualistic world. It was the world Jesus imagined and experienced – and invites us to live inside. It was the world Job ultimately comes to understand and live inside. It was the world Francis imagined and lived inside.

Francis came from a wealthy, noble family and the natural course for him was to become a knight, committed to violence and the exercise of power through force. But he rejected this; he ignored this path and found himself drawn onto a path of radical humility, simplicity and poverty. Others joined him because his way of being was contagious. People contracted the contagion from him.

Francis was born into a world of good and evil where the good knight vanquished the evil knight and peace would be established by force. In time he recognised this as wanting, empty, vacuous, doomed. Richard Rohr writing of Francis says: *All the conflicts and contradictions of life must find a resolution in us before we can resolve anything out there. Only the forgiven can forgive, only the healed can heal, only those who stand daily in need of mercy can offer mercy to others. Only in the individual person can the dualistic world be dissolved and resolved. Don't waste any time dividing the world into the good guys and the bad guys. Hold them both together in your own soul – where they are anyway – and you will have held together the whole world. You will have overcome the great divide – one place of spacious compassion.* This is the understanding of the world that Job came to experience through his long trials. This is the world Francis came to imagine.

The Climate Crisis is provoking us and asking us can we reimagine our world and ourselves in that world. I spoke a couple of weeks ago about the fantasy of progress in the world we were born into. We were raised to undergird the whole ark of our lives as one of progress, of growth. It is progress that is costing us the earth. Eight billion people fantasising, clamouring, struggling to live the way we do in Australia? George Monbiot, writing in the Guardian this week, provokes us to reimagine ourselves; nothing less will do it! We hope that our technologies will help us. And, maybe they will. But we need to claw back too. I noticed as soon as the government announced a road map to opening up again the number of pages in the travel segment of the paper burgeoned. Let's get back on the planes, back on the cruise ships, back to working our way through our bucket lists. Living the fantasy!

Monbiot writes: *There is a box labelled "climate", in which politicians discuss the climate crisis. There is a box named "biodiversity", in which they discuss the biodiversity crisis. There are other boxes, such as pollution, deforestation, overfishing and soil loss, gathering dust in our planet's lost property department. But they all contain aspects of one crisis that we have divided up to make it comprehensible. The categories the human brain creates to make sense of its surroundings are not, as Immanuel Kant observed, the "thing-in-itself". They describe artefacts of our perceptions rather than the world.*

Nature recognises no such divisions. As Earth systems are assaulted by everything at once, each source of stress compounds the others.

As Job's world was divided up into a perception of Good and Evil, boxes of Good and Evil, if you like. In trying to think about the climate crisis we are still dividing our world up into perceptions

of the world. We imagine the world in a particular way. We imagine that the Chinese and the Indians are the real ones polluting the world. The truth is they are polluting the world making cheap consumer goods for us so that we can change our décor and our TVs and our fashion at little cost to ourselves. It's a fantasy that it is their problem first and foremost. We are all connected.

Monbiot notes that Boris Johnson and Joe Biden are fixating on what is being called green-growth. So many are haranguing our own government to get on the new tech bandwagon, otherwise we will miss the boat. But the assumption behind this is that we can continue to have it all. As I said a couple of weeks ago, the earth is indifferent to our success and the probable decline we humans will face, as COVID is indifferent to whether we are pro or anti-vax. The earth has no particular moral scruples about whether we live or die, whether we prosper or whether we struggle.

The way of Jesus, the way that Job came to, the way that Francis came to was that of a radical humility which recognised that they were in themselves a microcosm of the whole world; that indeed within them was the life of God, that within themselves they carried all the possibility and all the tragedy of the world.

Which brings to the word of Jesus as he points the disciples toward what it means to believe. It is a saying which disarms us, pricks all our illusions about success and prosperity and progress, and invites us to inhabit a simplicity by which we may become whole in ourselves and contain within our selves all the life of God:

... whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.'

May it be so!

The Canticle of St Francis

Be praised in and through all creatures
– especially through Brother Sun
Good Lord, most high almighty
to you all praised is due,
all glory, honour and blessing,
belong alone to you;
there is no man whose lips
are fit to frame your name.

Be praised, my Lord God,
in and through all your creatures
especially among them,
through noble Brother Sun
by whom you light the day
in his radiant splendid beauty
he reminds us, Lord, of you.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and all the stars.
You have made the sky shine in their lovely light.
In Brother Wind be praised, my Lord,
and in the air, in clouds and calm,
in all the weather moods that cherish life.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water.
She is most useful, humble, precious, pure.
And Brother Fire, by whom you lighten night;
how fine is he, how happy, powerful, strong
Through our dear Mother Earth be praised, my Lord,
She feeds us, guides us, gives us plants, bright flowers
and all her fruits.

Be praised, my Lord, through us
when out of love for you we pardon one another.
When we endure in sickness and in sorrow.
Blessed are they who preserve in peace;
from you, Most High, they will receive their prize.

Be praised, my Lord, for our Sister Death
from whom no man alive can hope to hide;
wretched are they who die deep in their sin,
and blessed those Death finds doing your will.

For them there is no further death to fear.
O people! Praise God and bless him,
Give him thanks and serve him most humbly.

(Saint Francis of Assisi)

Prayer – prepared by Marg Davis

Loving God, we ask that you hear the prayers we bring before you today. Let us pray.

Throughout the past few weeks, we have focused on the Season of Creation, which will conclude tomorrow – the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. Help us to continue to be ever mindful of your beautiful world and the need to work together to do all we can to sustain, protect and save, your creation.

We pray for people in positions of power that they may exercise careful judgement in their decision making and that that they consider the immediate, and long-term, outcomes and are conscious of doing what is right, rather than pleasing powerful corporations and lobby groups to win votes.

Today we think of church leaders around the world and in particular those involved in the Plenary Council of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia, which commences today. We also ask you to help guide Australia's faith groups as they inform people about COVID matters pertaining to their congregations.

We pray for victims of political unrest, terrorism and displacement and the negative consequences that result. Grant your peace to all who are suffering and give them hope in what seems like a desperate, and hopeless, situation.

In our prayers we think of our brothers and sisters with whom we share our beautiful country
For those whose ancestors settled the land and for those who are new arrivals
For those taken from their families and those who are neglected or abused

Our prayers go to those living in regional and remote areas of Australia and we give thanks for the work of Frontier Services, who have been providing assistance to outback communities for more than 100 years.

We pray for all who suffer illness, distress, grief, loneliness, anxiety and depression - particularly in this time of COVID- uncertainty and we ask that you grant them comfort, healing and peace.

We give thanks for all the frontline workers. Please keep them strong in the vital work that they undertake. Help us all to be more compassionate and mindful of others and to consider ways we can reach out to those in need.

O God of Love, hear the prayers that we offer to you today. We pray through Jesus, our life and our hope. Amen.

Our Father in heaven ...

Blessing

In the name of God
the Maker of the whole world,
of Jesus, our new covenant,
and of the Holy Spirit,
who opens eyes and hearts,
Go in peace and be witnesses of hope. Amen

Early prayer: Rev Loni Vaitohi, Shepparton Uniting Church

Children: Photo by [Larm Rmah](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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NEWS AND NOTICES

Remembering and Celebrating our Halls.....

Dotted through the latest October edition of Pathfinder you'll find people's memories of how our halls have been used. Thank you to everyone who has contributed articles (Warwick, Heather, David, Elizabeth, Dot, Jan) and to Lorraine for several of the photos– we hope you enjoy them. May they inspire you to reflect on your own memories and perhaps send something for next month – written articles and photos welcome. We will also be including material on the website.

If you'd prefer to tell someone your story so we can write it down for you, please contact Dianne Richter (0413 750 089).

We have also set up an online option “Ormond Uniting Video Memories” where you can record your memories so we can create a video record. Here is the link:

<https://app.memento.com/ormond-uniting-video-memories/bo5dlK8Ap/record>

If you require assistance to record your memory, please contact Gary (0411116415) or garyrichter@yahoo.com.au. You don't need sophisticated recording equipment, just a smart phone or laptop with camera.

THE ORMOND LEARNING HUB

THE BIG STORIES OF OUR FAITH

Sometimes reading the scriptures can be strange and confusing. When a story seems a bit strange to us, we can rightly ask: Why this story? Where does it fit? Across the ark of both the Old and New Testaments there are some big stories into which much of the scriptures fit. Understanding these important stories and themes can make sense of particular passage's meaning.

In this third course for 2021 we will explore the big themes of the scriptures. Some of these will include:



- Bondage and Liberation, Exile and Return and Sin and Forgiveness.
- We will explore the question: Does the violence of the crucifixion really redeem us?
- What does the event of the resurrection mean?

We will draw our material from the series *Living the Questions* and allow generous time for small group conversation.

When: Thursdays 21st, 28th October & 4th November, 7.30pm.

Where: Online by Zoom (if we are able to meet face to face, we will advise at the time)

Cost: \$30 for the course

Who: led by Rev. Andrew Boyle

Enquiries and booking to: learninghub@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au



Meet the Peoples of Gondwana

As previously advertised, this Zoom seminar is on 12th October from 9am to 12.30pm. Zoom link will be given on registration – link below, cost \$20 (incl. Eventbrite fees).

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/meet-the-first-peoples-of-gondwana-tickets-167694624135>

Led by Rev. Dr. Garry Deverell a Trawlolway man from northern Lutrawita (Tasmania), we will be guided through the identity, history, resulting situation and aspirations of Indigenous peoples and how we can work with them to achieve something resembling justice.



Course outline: (over the page)

We will have a break every 30 -40 minutes. The first break is at 10.10am (till 10.20am), second at 11am (till 11.15am) and the third at 11.45am (till 11.55am)

There will be 2 group discussions. If one needs a brief break can take it at that time.

9.30-9.40 Welcome, acknowledgment of country, introduction of speaker

9.40-11.00 Session 1: Who Are the First Peoples? (History and Way of Life)

9.40 - 10.10 Presentation

10.10-10.20 Break

10.20-10.40 Discussion in break-out rooms

10.40 - 1.00 Plenary questions for Garry

11.00-11.15 Morning Tea

11.15-12.35 Session 2: What Do First Peoples Want? (Breaking through colonialism and its legacies, how can recent immigrants be allies?)

11.15 - 11.45 Presentation (Garry)

11.45 - 11.55 Break

11.55 - 12.15 Discussion in break-out rooms

12.15 - 12.30 Plenary questions for Garry (moderated by Sulesi)

12.30 - 12.35 Final remarks, notices (Dev/Jong Soo)