



ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

# PENTECOST 23 - ALL SAINTS' DAY - 31<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER

## 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.*

The Lord sets the prisoners free;  
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.  
The Lord watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
Praise the Lord!

## Prayer for All Saints' Day

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

God of the ages,  
we praise you for all your servants,  
who have done justice, loved mercy,  
and walked humbly with their God.  
For apostles and martyrs and saints  
of every time and place,  
who in life and death have witnessed to your truth,  
we praise you, O God.

For all your servants who have faithfully served you,  
witnessed bravely, and died in faith,  
who still are shining lights in the world,  
we praise you, O God.

For those no longer remembered,  
who earnestly sought you in darkness,  
who held fast their faith in trial,  
and served others,  
we praise you, O God.

For those we have known and loved,  
who by their faithful obedience and steadfast hope,  
have shown the same mind that was in Christ Jesus,  
we praise you, O God.

Keep us grateful for their witness,  
and, like them, eager to follow in the way of Christ.  
Grant us your gift of faith to know that  
Whether we live or whether we die we are held in your eternal love;  
through Jesus Christ the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

## Ruth 1. 1-22

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.'

Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.' But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.' Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' But Ruth said,  
'Do not press me to leave you  
or to turn back from following you!  
Where you go, I will go;  
where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people,  
and your God my God.'

Where you die, I will die—  
there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus and so to me,  
and more as well,  
if even death parts me from you!’

When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.



So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’ She said to them, ‘Call me no longer Naomi,

call me Mara,  
for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

I went away full,  
but the Lord has brought me back empty;  
why call me Naomi  
when the Lord has dealt harshly with me,  
and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?’

So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

## Psalm 146

Praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord, O my soul!  
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;  
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the Lord their God,  
who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith for ever;  
who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;  
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.  
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the Lord loves the righteous.  
The Lord watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign for ever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.  
Praise the Lord!

## Hebrews 9. 11-14

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!



## The Gospel according to Mark 12. 28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him

there is no other”; and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that no one dared to ask him any question.

## Reflecting

The book of Ruth contains what must be one of the most tender and poignant passages in scripture. We have read it today.

*Do not press me to leave you,<sup>[1]</sup>  
or to turn back from following you!  
Where you go, I will go;<sup>[2]</sup>  
where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people,<sup>[3]</sup>  
and your God my God.<sup>[4]</sup>  
Where you die, I will die—<sup>[5]</sup>  
there will I be buried.  
May the Lord do thus and so to me,<sup>[6]</sup>  
and more as well, if even death parts me from you!’*

In the face of the loss of everything that Naomi and Ruth and Orpah have known there is this deep commitment and faithfulness which emerges in their abandonment.

Ruth is a little book; a short story rather than what you might call a history although it lies in the midst of the histories: after Joshua and Judges and before the books of Samuel and Kings. The story has a hint of legend about it in the way in which it begins; a hint of the timelessness you get in fairy tales: *In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.* While it is a beautiful story in itself, it seems to me that the Book of Ruth is meant to be a little thorn in the side; a question mark hanging over Israel’s notions of ethnic and religious purity. The books of Joshua and Judges and Samuel and Kings are full of stories of how wonderfully God wiped away all the foreigners in the way of Israel occupying the Promised Land. Ruth is a story which inserts a glitch in the story of the progress of Israel and its pride in its chosen-ness and purity.

Ruth is a story about shame in the family closet and how a faithfulness toward God and to another, who according to tradition and law should be shunned, is the means of redemption and salvation. It’s a story about love of God and neighbour – even the neighbour who is considered to be enemy and beyond the pale.

Ruth and Orpah, Naomi’s two daughters-in-law, were Moabites. Moab was a land which comprised fertile plains surrounding the city of Jericho. It was on the plains of Moab on the East side of the Jordan that the wandering tribes of Israel stopped before they entered the Promised Land; it was on the plains of Moab that the book of Deuteronomy tells us Moses gave his last commandments to the people before they entered that land, a place they had anticipated for forty years; it was in Moab that Moses died and was buried; and it was Jericho, which lay in

Moab, which was the first conquest of the Israelites violent entering into and possessing of the Promised Land in the name of God. Moab in a sense was symbol of Israel's transition to nation under God. It is to *this* place that the famished Elimelech, whose name means *my God is king*, and Naomi must go. Their lives and existence hang in the balance and they return to this significant, formative place.



## Ruth, Naomi and Orpah

But Moab is not a good place to go to because the memory of its people is a deep source of shame and loathing in the Jewish memory. The people of Moab were descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham. You might remember that Lot accompanied Abraham when he left Haran and travelled out into the wilderness in obedience to the promise to Abraham of land and descendants. You may also remember the story of the destruction Sodom and Gomorrah, whatever it is that that strange story is about, and the turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt because she disobeyed the command not to look back on the two cities as they were destroyed. The aftermath of the destruction Sodom and Gomorrah is like some apocalyptic landscape; as though the world has ended and there seems to be no one remaining. Like Naomi's sons die in Ruth's story, Lot's sons-in-law are also killed in the aftermath of the events at Sodom and Gomorrah. The daughters are without husbands.

In this place of destruction Lot's two daughters reflect together in their desperation about the fact that they cannot now have children, saying to each other: *there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the world*. So in order to procreate they have intercourse with their drunken father and produce a son each: Moab and Ammon – children of incest. They become the fathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites. The memory of this unnatural act lies deep in the Israelites feelings about the Moabites – so much so that the abhorrence of it is enshrined in the law of Moses.

In the latter part of the book of Deuteronomy the relationship with the Moabites is proscribed in this way:

*Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord,*

The book of Deuteronomy tells the story of Moses preparing his people for entering into the land of Promise by giving them laws by which to live. Their relations with each other and with foreigners are very carefully mapped out – even to the tenth generation. Now for the Israelites the number ten has apocalyptic connotations or a sense of completeness or absoluteness about it. So in the light of this prohibition there is no question that relations with the Moabites should ever be entertained.

So the story of Ruth unfolds in the light of this shameful memory of the seduction by the daughters of Lot of their father and the very clear legal prohibition of any contact with the Moabites. As ancient Jewish story tellers began to tell this story their hearers' ears would have pricked up because to hear that the protagonist of the story has to go to Moab is sign that they are brought very low in this going to a place of deep shame – yet it becomes a place through which salvation comes. I think probably Ruth is a little historical parable; a sort stick-up-the-nose sort of story where the Israelites notions of racial and religious purity are challenged or provoked. While it is a story of great beauty and poignancy, in its own right, it is also a story which is told in the way it is and placed where it is in scripture for a reason; there to challenge and remind. We'll hear more next week of how the story unfolds.

There are echoes in this pattern of being laid low and then raised up in the story of Jesus; it is the pattern of his journey through death to life. As Jesus passed through a shameful death to resurrection, so we are called to follow. As salvation comes through Ruth's faithfulness, so for those of us who are committed to being followers of Jesus' way, we are called to be faithful also to his vision of a God who is also faithful; especially to those who are considered to be beyond the pale.

Looking at Ruth in this way reminds us that we cannot just take scripture at face value; if we were to do so than it's clear that Elimelech – *my God is king* – should not have gone to Moab under any circumstances. The very absolute moral prohibition about contact with the Moabites is the black and white take on the world that infects the religious life all too easily. But we know that life is not so simple and doesn't unfold for us in clear moral categories; sometimes we find



ourselves travelling through what we once thought was morally ambiguous country because deep love for another or faithfulness to them leads us there. The love of neighbour tempers what is sometimes a too-fierce love of God.

The challenging thing for us as we delve into scripture in order to reflect on our own lives is that so often we cannot just take it at face value – it is in some sense in the messy and contradictory whole that the pearls are to be found. And as we hear from the gospel reading today that there must at times be a prioritizing of commandments; a seeking after what is the most needful thing for us to do and be and so a shaping of life in the light of this.

We have left the story of Ruth at a low point today. Naomi tells her old friends in Bethlehem that life has been unimaginably bad:

*the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.  
I went away full,  
but the Lord has brought me back empty;  
why call me Naomi  
when the Lord has dealt harshly with me,  
and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?*

If you look at the stories of descent and then ascent in scripture; stories of being brought down and then lifted up; stories of death through to life, you will see that the descent is necessary before the ascent. It is only in the being brought to a place of utter abandonment that life's priorities become absolutely clear and a path through may be found. I imagine for the Jewish Naomi to have her sons take Moabite wives would have been a source of shame and ambivalence. But only in her own and the daughters-in-laws' abandonment in death, could a bond such as we have heard in the story be formed. And as we hear the story progress next week it is through Ruth's unshakeable faithfulness that redemption comes; of Naomi; of Ruth; and of the Moabites in the eyes of the tribes of Israel.

It is the pattern of the God whom we worship to break through our firmly held loyalties and loathings and bring love out of hate, friendship out of enmity, life out of death.

As we mark All Saints' Day may we say thanks be to God for those ancestors in the faith, some very ancient, some more intimately known to us, who have through their faithfulness to God made known to us the love and redeeming power of the eternal God.

## Prayers – prepared by Mardie Townsend

God, our Creator, you made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them is your own; hear the prayers we bring for your people.

Lord, you meet us in unexpected places and people. Help us to be open to recognising you in those we meet, that you may heal our hurts and make us ready to serve you in the needs of our neighbours.

God, our Peace, where there are lives blighted by violence or warfare, division or disharmony, may we be active in peace-making, reaching out in love and building bonds of care. Today we think especially of the people of Afghanistan, Sudan and Myanmar. Remind us, O God, that though they may be far from us, they too are your loved people. Inspire us individually and collectively to recognise them as neighbours in need and to act on your command to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

God, our Welcome, where there are lives diminished by hunger, homelessness, alienation and loneliness, may we find ways to offer practical support, hospitality and friendship. Teach us how to open our arms to the friendless and others in need, so that your people shall truly be our people.

God, our Freedom, we pray for all whose lives are subject to oppression or imprisonment. We think especially of refugees and asylum seekers, political prisoners held captive by oppressive regimes, and the many Indigenous Australians whose lives are damaged and even lost through imprisonment. Grant us the courage to speak out against unfair imprisonment and bring justice to those who are oppressed.

God, our Hope, we pray for the sick and dying, for the sad and the distressed. Help us to be your consoling people, standing alongside those in need of comfort and a steadying hand. Today as we approach All Saints Day, we think of those known to us who have died – those who have loved you with heart, mind, soul and strength. Help us to follow their example and love as you have commanded us to do.

God of the Universe, as we face up to the grim reality of your creation and the wellbeing of future generations being under looming threat from climate change, we pray for honesty and responsibility in decision-makers and for selflessness among those who elect them. May all put greed and selfishness aside to ensure that your creation is sustained and your grace and love are known throughout the earth.

Our Father in heaven ...

Amen

## Blessing

Go in peace, and remember:  
goodness is stronger than evil;  
love is stronger than hate;  
light is stronger than darkness;  
life is stronger than death;  
victory is ours  
through Christ who loved us.

**Amen.**

Cover photo: Ruth and Naomi portrayed in the South Façade of the US Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, stone carving.

Church statuary: Jesus and the scribes, Sagrada Família, Barcelona  
Ruth, Naomi and Orpah, 1959, Kyra Markham, American, 1891–1967

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## NEWS AND NOTICES

### **OPENING UP – FROM NEXT SUNDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER**

Following the lifting of government restrictions, we will be able to meet together again for worship from Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November. The following guidelines will apply to us:

- For the time being, our numbers will be limited to 45 people in the church if all people present are double vaccinated
- If we are not all fully vaccinated, or someone is not willing to give their vaccination status, we will be limited to 30 people in the church
- We must continue to wear masks while in the church
- We will continue to check in with QR codes or manually if we can't check in with a smart phone
- We will be asked by a person on the door to give our vaccination status (this will be manually recorded)

As you will know there is some controversy in the community about being vaccinated and sharing vaccination status with others. Regrettably, this controversy is dividing families, workplaces and communities. In order to protect each other and limit the further spread of the virus, though, we are required by government to record the status of those present at church gatherings. Unless we are able to verify each person's vaccination status, we are required to limit our worship numbers to 30 (when we are permitted to accommodate 45). When you arrive at church you will be asked whether you are double-vaccinated. If you are not or are not willing to share your status, we will be required to limit our numbers

to 30. We trust that you understand it is important we have this information in order that all who come can participate.

Printed worship resources will continue to be delivered to those who are not able to make it to worship.

## **SPRING CLEAN OF THE CHURCH**

The church has been unused for the past three months so we will need to give it a deep clean before Sunday 7<sup>th</sup>. If you are able to help with this task your presence on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> between 10.30am and midday will be greatly appreciated. Please bring cleaning materials – dusters, buckets, cleaning clothes. A vacuum cleaner with an upholstery nozzle will help with the cleaning of the upholstered chairs.

## **NOTICE OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETING – 14<sup>th</sup> November – 11am**

We will be holding a congregational meeting on November 14<sup>th</sup> after worship. At the meeting we will:

- Be asked to approve the budget for 2022
- Receive a Project Control group report on the progress of the building project
- Be asked to consider a proposal to increase the number of elected church councillors from six to seven.
- Hold an election for church councillors

Further details will be distributed next Sunday. Please remember to give consideration to – and then talk to and nominate - suitable people for church council. Nominations close at midday on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> November.

## **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](mailto:garyrichter@yahoo.com.au). You don't need sophisticated recording equipment, just a smart phone or laptop with camera.

## **ASRC KILOMETRES OF COMPASSION FUNDRAISER**

**When: Sat 20<sup>th</sup> November 11.30 am onwards**

**Where: ALLNUT PARK McKinnon Melways ref 69 C11. We plan to meet at the Central Rotunda and take it from there.**

Please BYO chair, picnic rug, morning/afternoon tea and lunch depending on how long you wish to stay.

Around Australia, on the weekend of the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> November, supporters of the ASRC and the work they do will take on challenges such as walking, bike riding, rowing, swimming etc. We have registered Ormond Uniting Church as a team and at this stage are inviting everyone from OUC – families and friends to join us at Allnut Park and be part of a walking team challenge clocking up some kms. We will mostly be walking around the paths of the park but for those who would like to venture further – that is fine. In this way, people who would like to participate can choose exactly how far they want to walk – every step counts!!

We would also like this to be a 'post lockdown' social event. It will be a great opportunity to relax and enjoy the beautiful Allnut Park and catch up with each other. Everyone is welcome regardless of whether you are able to participate in some walking or not – a cheer squad would be great!!

Please look out for more details in next Pathfinder and in the meantime **PLEASE SAVE THE DATE!!** Any queries at this stage please contact Brenda Grootendorst mob. 0433494600.

## **JUSTICE AND INTERNATIONAL MISSION CONVENTION**

6/11/21 9.30am - 4.15pm by Zoom (Free)

"Our Faith in Democracy: How do you have a meaningful say?"

Register online by 1/11 (ie NOW) 'www.eventbrite.com' and search for 'Justice and International Mission Convention 2021'

## A MESSAGE FROM HEATHER & DAVID

David and I have had a long association with Cowes Uniting Church. We received a card from them this week. Here is part of it:

**"We are sending our greetings, love and prayers from St John's Cowes...**

**Know our prayers for you and your community. God is love, and you are truly loved by God: rest on his promises..."** Check out the November Pathfinder for a bigger excerpt from the card.

## PATHFINDER REMINDER FOR ARTICLES AND PHOTOS:

Due Date for submissions for the **November** edition of Pathfinder is this **Monday 1<sup>st</sup> November** to Dianne and Gary by 6pm.

## 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 31st October 2021 11.00am to 12.00pm**. Zoom Link is being emailed to the congregation and you can phone in by dialling 7018 2005 (Melbourne) using Meeting ID: Meeting ID: 821 5829 8886 Passcode: 496747

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## ROSTER for Sunday 7 November 2021

READING	Lisa Saffin	
PRAYERS	Ron Townsend	
COMMUNION	Warwick Barry Marg Davis	
DOOR DUTY	Mardie Townsend Elizabeth Northwood	
SOUND	Gary Richter	
FLOWERS	Heather Baxter/Michelle K	
MUSIC	Peter Hurley	
COUNTNG	Hans Tilstra Dennis Taylor	
RESOURCES DELIVERY Friday 5 November	Mardie Townsend	

