

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



19 MARCH 2023

LENT 4



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.

HYMN TIS 161 Tell out my soul...

Prayer for today

Joy in Justice

God,
As Spirit
Open us in joy
The joy in justice
The joy of doing justly
The joy of achieving justice
The joy of right relationship
The joy of all cared for and catered for
The joy of all getting their due
The joy of change established
The joy of a world put right
The joy of your kingdom come
The joy of your will done
Open us in joy
That we might justly do
Just as we pray.

Amen.

Jon Humphries

Confession

Holy God, hear our prayer:
For the mending of our hearts, torn apart by our unkindness;
For the healing of our souls, wasting away from the despair around us;
For the forgiveness we seek for the sin we have allowed to persist;
For the reconciliation of the world, whose division condemns us;
We pray for the courage to admit our fault,
The strength to amend our actions,

And the hope that your grace awaits us.
Through Christ we pray.

Amen.

Assurance Of Forgiveness

Here is Good News! God is willing to cleanse us from our pride, our blindness, our stubborn insistence on having things “our way”. Through God’s grace we are washed and forgiven.

Thanks be to God

Amen.

HYMN: TIS 164 The Great love of God...

Scripture

From the Hebrew scriptures

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Samuel Anoints David

16The Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.’ 2Samuel said, ‘How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.’ And the Lord said, ‘Take a heifer with you, and say, “I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.” 3Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.’ 4Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, ‘Do you come peaceably?’ 5He said, ‘Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.’ And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.’ 7But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’ 8Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, ‘Neither has the Lord chosen this one.’ 9Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, ‘Neither has the Lord chosen this one.’ 10Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, ‘The Lord has not chosen any of these.’ 11Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all your sons here?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.’ And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.’ 12He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’ 13Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

From the New Testament

John 9:1-41

A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

9As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' 9Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' 10But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' 11He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' 12They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' 16Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. 17So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' 20His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' 25He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' 26They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 27He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' 28Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' 30The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never

since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ ³⁴They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

Spiritual Blindness

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ³⁶He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ ³⁷Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ ³⁸He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him. ³⁹Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ ⁴¹Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains.

HYMN: TIS 681, Lord let me see...

A Pastoral Letter:

Part of a sermon to be preached at Ormond Uniting Church on Sunday, 19th March 2023. Refer to the readings from 1 Samuel and John above.

Have you ever tried to imagine what it might be like to be blind from birth and then suddenly to be given the ability to see? Up to that point, you will have relied upon the senses of touch and hearing and to some extent smell. That is how you will understand the world. That table in front of you is known to you as a collection of touch sensations. Suddenly, the sensations that you have relied upon to make sense of the world around you have been superseded by a new sense. colour, brightness, light, glare, and even shadows, the table with which you are familiar as a collection of touch experiences now has perspective and shape in a way you had not imagined. We should not ever underestimate the radical change that this might make in a person's life. We are perhaps more familiar with the change that occurs when a person who is deaf discovers what a difference hearing makes. In fact, the challenge for some is almost too much to bear. We are hear from time to time of instances where people throw away their hearing aids, preferring the familiar world of silence. I remember a similar feeling, though in reverse, when I was working in London, and my ears got clogged up (as they sometimes do). For a week or so I lost most of my hearing, and what a magical experience that was. Silence! Blissful silence!

Bear all of this in mind, when you are reading, or thinking about, the story of Jesus healing the man born blind from birth. We get in the story, a real sense of the confusion of this event. The blind man, sensing the presence of Jesus, asks to be cured. One wonders if he knows what he is asking for. He has not ever experienced sight, and he does not know what a sighted life is like. And yet he asks, and Jesus obliges with a cure. The cure involves mud and a wash. One gets the impression that it is all a matter of routine concern for Jesus. He can cure, so he does. The man is astounded and the witnesses are also astounded too. They want an explanation. Rather, it might be said that they have ready-made pre-packaged explanations, which they want to try out; like this

man must have been a sinner to have been afflicted by such a severe disability. And they want to know who to credit, or should I say blame. Clearly the healer is to blame. Is this not the guy who continues to break the rules? Does he not thumb his nose at convention; at the time-honoured ways of doing things? As far as they are concerned, both the blind man and the healer are sinners.

Jesus takes the opportunity to make a general point about seeing. There are two different ways of seeing. One is reminded of the passage we looked at last week where Jesus makes the point that there are two ways of quenching one's thirst. In this case, the witnesses are the ones who are blind because their sight has been distorted. Seeing, you see, is not a passive thing, as our blind man learns. Seeing requires work. Seeing requires paying attention. Seeing requires seeing the tree in the forest. Jesus seems not to be too interested in his healing abilities. All in a day's work, he might say. Jesus is much more interested in the other sort of seeing -- a Godly sort of seeing; a seeing into the heart and soul. This Godly sort of seeing reveals things that we, like the blind man in the story, could not have imagined were there. Things with shape and perspective with colour and form, the secrets of lives that once were, maybe continue to be conducted in darkness -- seeing, as St Paul remarks, through a glass darkly.

Our Old Testament reading today portrays God seeing in David a value others could not see. God does not dismiss David, he chooses him. And in the New Testament story of the healing of the blind man, Jesus teaches his audience, and us, the value of seeing as God sees. It might be worth putting a bit of effort into that. In a world in crisis we might need a bit of perspective. It's not so much a matter of foresight. It's not so much a matter of hindsight. It's a matter of God-sight.

May it be so

HYMN: TIS 690 Beauty for brokenness...

Prayer – Prepared by Mardie Townsend

Today's prayers of the people draw on the words of both Bruce Prewer and Janet Nelson.

Let us pray.

Jesus, you are the Light of the world. To you we bring our prayers.

What a strange mixture we are, most patient God. Insatiable in our searching, bold with our theories, surrounded by electronic enchantments, yet creatures of boundless blindness when it comes to the things that ultimately matter.

Send us to that holy Man who made a salve from clay and touched the eyes of the blind. May he touch us and restore to us a sane view of life. Let us see ourselves as beings made for worship, fellowship, justice and love. Enable us to treasure our friends and pray for our enemies, serve our neighbours and seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness.

Touch our eyes that we may become what we really are and bring light to others who live in darkness.

We pray for the peoples of the world: for all whose lives are shattered by warfare and violence; for victims of incompetent and corrupt government; for leaders of nations, for our state, federal and local politicians; for those who administer the law. We think especially of those suffering due to the war in Ukraine, the people of Vanuatu whose homes have been destroyed by the cyclones, the people of Turkey and Syria suffering both practically and emotionally from the effects of earthquakes, indigenous Australians still suffering from the effects of the narrow vision of past and present policies and practices.

Open our eyes and the eyes of those in power Lord, to see your light and to spread your light in this dark and broken world. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the community in which we live: for our families, our neighbours and our friends; for our church family; for the people of this city and this country, especially those without shelter or food, those struggling to cope with everyday living costs such as paying their rent or their mortgage, feeding and clothing their children, those unable to afford the medical and dental treatment they urgently need.

Open our eyes and the eyes of those in power Lord, to see your light and to spread your light in this dark and broken world. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are in trouble or need: for the sad and the broken-hearted; the lonely and the friendless; the sick and the dying, and all who care for them. Today especially we pray for the family of Wilma Tucker as they grieve her loss. Jesus, Sun of Righteousness, shed your warming rays on the cold and comfortless places of our lives, that in our tears and terrors we may not be alone.

Open our eyes Lord, to see your light and to spread your light in this dark and broken world. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And now let us join in the prayer Jesus taught us:

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

You are the peace of all things calm
You are the place to hide from harm
You are the light that shines in dark
You are the heart's eternal spark
You are the door that's open wide
You are the guest who waits inside
You are the stranger at the door
You are the calling of the poor
You are my Lord and with me still
You are my love, keep me from ill
You are the light, the truth, the way
You are my Saviour this very day.

HYMN: TIS 684 Love will be our Lenten calling...

Thoughts for the week to come

Living in the Now

What's gone has made you what you are
So don't fear what's ahead
Put trust in what will be, will be
And choose to live instead
Don't live in the now worrying
What may or may not be
Take this moment in your time
And live it totally
There's no time like the present
Breathe deep and feel alive
Living in the here and now
Will help you rise and thrive
Now is all there ever is
It's the only time that's real
Let the future take its course
And leave the past to heal

by Vanessa Hughes

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Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

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NEWS & NOTICES