

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

Lent 5

April 3



Jesus healing the blind beggar ~

The ceremonial Gospel book of Holy Roman emperor Otto III

WORSHIP AT HOME

Lent is a time when we make our way to Jerusalem with Jesus. It is a time when we are invited to be attentive to the call to take up our cross and follow. We're not so good at following in our self-actualised world. We are raised to believe that we should be masters, or mistresses, of our own destinies.

But as we watch Jesus go to the cross, we see him give himself over to others who subject him to unspeakable cruelty and humiliation. We read from Luke's gospel today where Jesus tells the disciples, in very explicit terms, what is going to take place for him in Jerusalem. Everything will be lost – and the disciples cannot comprehend what this will look like. Paul also writes of everything he was as being lost in order that he gain the freedom of being in Christ. This is the journey to resurrection which is the path through loss. This is the mystery of the Easter journey. We observe this journey, we give ourselves over to it, into the loving hands of God, knowing that he makes all things new.

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.

Prayer

Holy God,
Into this world you have sent Jesus your living Word.
He has born your light and truth to us
and shines through the darkness we so often find ourselves surrounded by.

Amidst a culture of deception and lies,
Of posturing and power,
He has walked humbly among us and has shown us your face.

Our delight and joy is in him and the way he has walked for us.
He calls us into your freedom,
He wipes the blindness from our eyes
that we may see through the gloom that too often shrouds our world.
In this knowledge we rest in the peace he offers us.

Loving God, as we approach Easter and the remembrance of Jesus' passion,
We ask that the light of your spirit may shine on us and the darkness of our paths

And the darkness the world is stalled in.

Lord, we need your mercy,
We need to carry the knowledge of your mercy in our bones.

Give us your grace we pray that we may bear our own crosses to calvary and to victory.
In the name of Christ,
Sign of your love for us.
Amen

Again, as in past weeks, we find our readings from the Hebrew scriptures speak to the deep suffering of the Ukrainian people. These words are carried over the millennia to us in our own time and remind of the constant witness of the scriptures to the God of Israel who sees people's suffering. The Psalmist writes:

*Vindicate me, O Lord,
for I have walked in my integrity, ...*

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

We pray these words for ourselves and for all in our world who suffer.

Isaiah 43. 14-16

Thus says the Lord,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
For your sake I will send to Babylon
and break down all the bars,
and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation.
I am the Lord, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King.
Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honour me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,

the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

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 Philippians 3. 4b-14

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke 18. 31-43

Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.' But they understood



nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' Then he shouted, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

Christ Healing the Blind Man' by Robert Hodgell

Reflecting

This extract from Luke is the account of Jesus' final approach to Jerusalem. We read this account today, the Sunday before Palm Sunday when we read of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As Jesus processes into Jerusalem on the donkey we hear the crowds cry out:

'Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!'

The crowds seem to be welcoming a new reign of a different kind.

You will remember the few, so-familiar and simple words at the beginning of Luke's parable we know by the title *The Parable of the Good Samaritan: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho*. This going down is not like we might say: I am going down to Geelong today, but is a literal going down – down a steep road. So, when Luke tells us that Jesus says: *See, we are going up to Jerusalem*, it means that Jesus and his followers are making the steep climb up to the city and the temple. Many of the psalms are described as psalms of ascent, sung as pilgrims made their way up to Jerusalem to the temple.

This little gospel vignette of the healing of the blind man as Jesus goes along his way is laden with meaning and resonances. Firstly, the disciples who have been with Jesus all this time do not understand. Yet, the blind man does. He calls Jesus by his Messianic title and in his simple, open faith he follows with joy, filled with praise; and goes with Jesus, up to Jerusalem.

Not for nothing does the blind man call Jesus Son of David, though. And here is the resonance with Israel's story. Before Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish life and the site of the temple it was a city which was home to a tribe known as the Jebusites. King David had decided Jerusalem was to be the seat of his power and that he was going to invade and conquer it. It was known as an impregnable city, though. (we might ask in these days as Putin invades Ukraine, if we can say anything positive about one group invading and conquering another) Because of its elevated position the Jebusites thought that the city was invulnerable. The second book of Samuel records the Jebusite king as saying: *You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back*—thinking, *'David cannot come in here.'*

But David responds to the Jebusite king's claim, *'Whoever wishes to strike down the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, those who hate David. Therefore, it is said, 'The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.'* David's soldiers made their way up a water shaft and in that way infiltrated the city which was supposed to be impregnable.

So, the blind man calls out to Jesus, as he makes his way up to Jerusalem to undertake another assault on the city, and names him Son of David. The disciples can't see Jesus, the blind man does. And becomes part of the motley entourage of the blind and the lame who make their way to the establishment of a new reign based on peace, not on violence. As Jesus makes his way to make this peaceful assault on the city, we hear an echo of the angels who appeared to the shepherds:

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!

And we hear, also, an echo of Jesus' manifesto in Luke 4 as he reads the prophet Isaiah in his home-town synagogue:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

After this vignette with the blind man, Jesus goes into the town of Jericho where he greets Zacchaeus, little despised tax collector, up a tree, trying to get a glimpse of him. Zachaeus is an outcast and a social pariah because he a chief tax collector. But Jesus chooses to be guest. And salvation comes to him and his household.

These stories of Luke's about these outcast people being the ones who see and recognise the coming kingdom of God as it is proclaimed and lived out by Jesus, remind us that we cannot afford to be so certain that we see and comprehend. The disciples, so close to Jesus, couldn't understand. It is always those who are so deeply aware of their own poverty of spirit who are ultimately receptive to the kingdom. These are the ones who ultimately are the guests at the banquet in Luke.

As we draw toward reading Jesus' Passion again, we are coming full circle from Luke's nativity story, where the news comes to the shepherds, outcasts living on the edge. Again, we are reminded that it those on the edge who recognise and receive God's anointed one. We are invited to befriend those places in ourselves where we are poor and to know that it is to these places that God's Christ may come and bring joy and fill us with praise.

Prayers of the People – prepared by Mardie Townsend

Jesus, friend and intercessor, you were anointed as the Saviour of the world; we pray for the peoples of all nations:

- For all who suffer hardships of war, famine, disease – at this time we pray especially for the people of Ukraine and we give thanks and pray for the peoples of Poland, Moldova and all the other countries who are caring for the refugees from the war;
- For leaders of nations and all who exercise authority – we pray for President Putin, that he may be stirred to step back from his aggression and to recognise the rights of the Ukrainian people to live in peace, and we pray for our own government, that they may see fit to show compassion to all who have sought refuge here from war and persecution;
- For all who work to create a more just world – for organisations such as Red Cross, Amnesty International, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and many others.

Break open our hearts, that we too may be bearers of your message of justice and peace.

Jesus, in your mercy,
Receive the prayers we offer.

You were anointed as God's beloved Son; we pray for those we hold dear and all with whom our lives are bound:

- For our families and friends and for those with whom we work;
- For all lonely and alienated members of our community and our society – today especially we pray for those affected by the horror of suicide and for those whose lives are marred by dementia;
- For all who make our community a more compassionate place – families, carers, support organisations, care facilities.

Break open our hearts, that we may bring your message of love to all.

Jesus, in your mercy,
Receive the prayers we offer.

You were anointed to bring good news to the captive and healing to the sick; we pray for all in trouble or distress:

- For all who are weighed down by pain or grief;
- For all who are sick or facing death;
- For all who bring release or healing to your people.

Break open our hearts, that we may bring you're your words of comfort to all in need of them.

Jesus, in your mercy,
Receive the prayers we offer.

These prayers we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.
Amen.

Our Father in heaven ...

Blessing

Lord of every pilgrim heart,
bless our journeys
on these roads
we never planned to take,
but
through your surprising wisdom
discovered
we were on ...

Jesus healing the blind beggar Bartimaeus near Jericho - The ceremonial Gospel book of Holy Roman emperor Otto III. Evangeliar Kaiser Ottos III [~ 1000 AD] artists: monks from the scriptorium on the monastic island Reichenau in the lake Constance München / Munich. Classified as world documentary Heritage by UNESCO

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NEWS AND NOTICES

WORSHIP DURING THE DEMOLITION PHASE

The worship service for this weekend will be able to be face to face and the congregation is welcomed back to the Church again at 10.00am Sunday. We hope that as many as possible can join in.

POSTPONEMENT OF ORMOND LEARNING HUB COURSE

Please note: the March Learning Hub Course “Reading Luke’s passion” has been postponed until further notice – a future date for the course will be determined in time.

UNITING WORLD – LENT EVENT



Please refer to the UnitingWorld link [here](#) for some more information around the LENT EVENT

Lent Event calls you to join other Christians in a pledge to give up or take up something in solidarity with those who live with less. Learn about how to be a good global neighbour and see the many ways to donate to support our work, knowing that every dollar is part of God’s mission in the world, ending poverty and building hope.

EAST COAST of AUSTRALIA - FLOODING EMERGENCY APPEAL

The recent floods in southern Queensland and NSW have been truly devastating in their magnitude and destruction. As is so often the case, the Uniting Church is stepping up to support individuals and communities affected by such disasters. Below you will find details of the National appeals from the Vic/Tas Moderator Rev. Denise Lersch and National President Rev. Sharon Hollis to support the work of the Assembly in flood relief efforts. If you are able to contribute there is a button which takes you to a site where you can make a financial contribution to this work.

You will find the link [here](#) (press ctrl key and click mouse) for the national appeal launched by Uniting Church in Australia President, Rev Sharon Hollis.

ACT FOR PEACE – UKRAINE CRISIS

As we are all aware, the crisis in the Ukraine has continued to be devastating. Further updates around the Ukraine Crisis Appeal can be found [here](#):



UKRAINE CRISIS EMERGENCY APPEAL



The shocking Russian invasion of Ukraine has created a humanitarian crisis unlike anything seen in Europe since World War II. Millions of people could become refugees, forced from their homes and their loved ones.

Please give what you can today to help provide urgently needed food, medicine and temporary shelter to displaced families.

ACT FOR PEACE
CONFRONTING INJUSTICE TOGETHER
THROUGH THE *actalliance*

The international humanitarian agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia | ABN 86 619 970 188

PLEASE GIVE URGENTLY



CALL: 1800 025 101
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