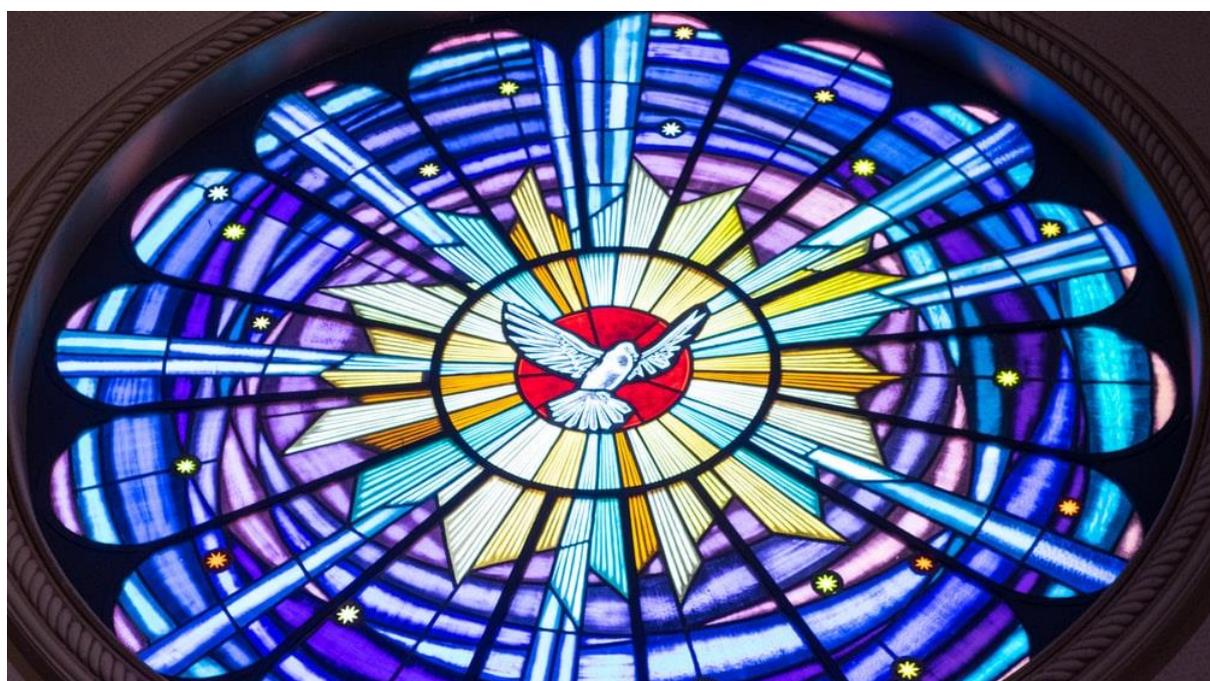


ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



12 JUNE 2022
TRINITY SUNDAY



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.

Prayer for today

Journeying God:

We stumble down the path of life
with scant attention to the warning signs
of obstacles ahead.

Stubbing toes and barking shins,
in headlong haste we push ahead
to a destination not yet in sight.

We trip on good intentions
and worthy goals left behind by others
on their journeys to God knows where.

We get tangled up in words
that wrap around our fantasies
of destiny and power.

We follow red herrings and false trails
with raised hopes and confident strides
knowing better than the guidebook's map.

We feint at shadows, prepare ourselves
for fearful threats and misfortune,
forgetting that promised help is never far away.

We build castles in the air to guard your realm
forgetting that the Kingdom's walls
already stand on solid ground and will not fall.

We stumble down the path of life,
this day, this week,
we pray for clarity of vision,
steadfast purpose,
a faith overcoming fear,
optimism tempered by reality,

knowledge tempered by reasonable doubt,
anger tempered by compassion,
a sense of wonder at the majesty
of creation,
and a true sense of direction.

We pray for forgiveness:

Lord, on our faltering path through life
we seek forgiveness,
knowing that forgiveness will not make wrongs right,
will not heal wounds,
will not make imperfection perfect,
will not make the crooked straight
and the high places low.

We seek forgiveness because forgiveness
makes for new starts
and building anew,
Forgiveness makes communication and dialogue possible;
makes the weak stronger,
and because forgiveness is simply your way, good Lord,
it is your thing,
and is offered freely,
it waits only for us to recognise it and take it up.

”Your sins are forgiven.”

Thanks be to God.

Scripture

From the Hebrew scriptures

Proverbs 8:1-4

The Gifts of Wisdom

8 Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
2 On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
3 beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
4 ‘To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.

Proverbs 8:22-31

Wisdom's Part in Creation

22 The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
23 Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
25 Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
26 when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
27 When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
28 when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
30 then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

From the New Testament

Romans 5:1-5

Results of Justification

5Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Reflection

By Grace Alone

It is around the year 1515, and a young Augustinian friar prays in his cell. He prays again ... and again. He is close to panicking. His sin overwhelms him. He is wracked with regret. He wants to make amends, to set things right, to start again, to be renewed — but nothing works.

He looks back, but it's like staring into a dark pit. He tries to look forward, but all he can see is more of the same. His church urges him to try harder, to challenge evil with a life of good works — and he applies his considerable talents as scholar, as linguist, as musician to the task, but nothing works. Friar Martin is at his wits end.

Martin searches his Bible for an answer. Surely there must be an answer...somewhere. He happens on Paul's letter to the Romans. He's read it often, but he struggles with it again. Then, one of those lightbulb moments. How could he have missed it?

We are justified by faith

and again

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit

There it was. Again and again. Put in the simplest contemporary terms: we are loved — we just are. We simply need to be aware of it. That's the essence of Faith; being aware. Getting the message, and living accordingly. This love is not, cannot be, earned. On reading these words our life-task changes from the desperate quest for virtue, to the living of a life in the manner of one who is loved — and as one who is an instrument of love.

Nobody wants to hang out with a goody-goody — with a perfect person. God forbid! Much better to hang out with a person who understands his or her place in the grand scheme of things. We don't want to hang out with a super-efficient manager, but with someone who will love us to pieces, because they are loved — unconditionally.

Martin Luther's personal problem was solved, but Martin did not become a perfect human being. Martin had his failings. The one with which we find it most difficult to come to terms is his dislike of Jews. Martin wanted the Jews to be persecuted, to be done away with, and he advised the powers to be to act accordingly. Does that sound familiar? Some five hundred years later, Adolf Hitler took comfort from Luther's antisemitism.

Of course, God's grace does not give us leave to do what we like. Luther had a blind spot. We all have blind spots, and God's love does not let us off from engaging in thorough-going self examination. We have responsibility — to ourselves and to each other. God's love enables us, but does not excuse us. God's love liberates us, but does not make it OK to do anything at all. God's love does not remove from us the need to adhere to a code of ethics. God's love does not make such words as virtue, goodness, compassion and solidarity meaningless. We need to live up to God's love. People want to see the fruits of God's love.

But let me step back for a moment. Luther did not have just a personal problem, he had a social problem too. Luther noted that the church of his time had lost sight of the principle of Sola Gratia (grace alone). It had taken upon itself the authority to be the dispenser of God's Grace. It had literally taken the love of God out of God's hands. One thing had led to another, and the Church had decided that it even had the right to sell that love in small packets — in the form of get-out-of-Purgatory-free cards, otherwise known as "indulgences". Luther was scandalised, and he put his objections in writing and nailed them to the door of the Cathedral at Wittenberg. That set the cats among the pigeons! It wasn't so much that the Church objected to the asking of questions and the raising of issues. The Church's theologians had always done that. What the Church authorities objected to was the obvious tone of revolution. Luther wanted things to change. Luther was not making some fine clever theological points. Luther was saying the status quo was WRONG.

Well, we know with the benefit of hindsight what happened. The Church's authority was undermined. The difference between authority and opinion was blurred. Not only was the Church radically changed, but the social world changed as well, and the door opened to what is called "The Enlightenment", and the social world we up to very recently inhabited.

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In the early 20th Century a young Pastor in Switzerland also struggled with the notion of God's Grace. Karl Barth was a member of a church that was heir to Luther's reformation. A Protestant, in other words. Barth noted that the Protestant churches, in particular, had tended to look to social trends to shape their ideas of how and when God works in the world. In other words, there had become a marriage between society and church. No longer did the church stand outside society and stand in judgement of that society, but there had developed a cosy relationship between them. An extreme example was when Hitler decided to establish a German Church, and to invite the existing churches to sign up. The State would appoint the office-bearers (Bishops) and take part in the church's governance. In this way the church would become an arm of the State.

Some theologians saw the danger in this and refused to sign up. The Confessing Church, of which Barth had become a member (along with Dietrich Bonhoeffer) was one of the few dissident churches. Barth was instrumental in drafting what was to become known as the Barmen Declaration which declared that God called the shots, that He broke into our lives as an act of pure grace, that he stands in judgement of principalities and powers, and that the Christian owes allegiance to Him and Him alone.

Barth made sure that a copy of the Barmen Declaration reached Hitler. Subsequently, Bart had to leave Germany and take refuge in Switzerland, his home country. Bonhoeffer was later executed for taking part in the attempt to assassinate Hitler.

If ever there was a sense that God's Grace is not an easy grace, it is in the experience of the church under duress in the early years of the twentieth century.

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Luther and Barth are examples of Grace at work. These two, and many others, have seen that "the faith" is not about being virtuous; not about always doing the right thing; not about social justice; not about always being good.

The Christian community is a beloved community — always loved and always loving. And the love we speak about is always the gracious love of God; given freely, unrequested, not the result of our virtuous lives, but that which makes virtue possible and virtue visible.

God's gracious love is the sign and seal of our faith. Not just for Luther. Not just for Barth. It is the gracious sign and seal of this community — here in Ormond. It has consequences. With it we will go forward. Without it we will be lost.

May it be so.

Thanks be to God.

Prayers – prepared by Marg Davis

The prayer for today is in part from the text “Let us Pray”

Dear Lord - today, Trinity Sunday, we bring before you our prayers for your people

Let us pray

Creator God, hear our prayer for your precious earth and all its creatures.

Help us to care responsibly for the wonderful world you have created and entrusted to us

We pray for peace and justice, so that your will may be done

We pray for people whose homes, communities and livelihoods have been destroyed

Our thoughts are with those who live in places ravaged by conflict and war - including the people of Ukraine, Afghanistan and Ethiopia

Hear our prayers for the world-wide church, particularly in places where it is persecuted or ignored

We pray for church leaders and for all who minister and serve in your name

Three-in-one God, you give life to your people, comforting us in our sorrows and sustaining us in our need

Hear our prayer for all who are suffering

We pray for the grief stricken, the broken hearted and all in despair

For the sick, the sad and the lonely

We ask your blessings on those who are disadvantaged, and neglected, and in these wintery conditions we think of all who are sleeping rough and those who are cold and hungry and frightened, particularly children

We ask your blessing on our families, friends, neighbours and ourselves.

Help us to love, and care for one another as you have loved us.

God of glory, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Let us join together to say The Lord's Prayer

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 forever. Amen

Blessing

May the God of Surprises delight you, inviting you to accept gifts not yet imagined.
May the God of Transformation call you, opening you to continual renewal.
May the God of Justice confront you, daring you to see the world through God's eyes.
May the God of Abundance affirm you, nudging you towards deeper trust.
May the God of Embrace hold you, encircling you in the hearth of God's home.
May the God of Hopefulness bless you, encouraging you with the fruits of faith.
May the God of Welcoming invite you, drawing you nearer to the fullness of God's expression in you.
May God Who is Present be with you, awakening you to God in all things, all people, and all moments.
May God be with you.
Amen.

Thoughts for the week to come

Let Your God Love You

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone.
Empty
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
God understands.
God loves you
With an enormous love,
And only wants
To look upon you
With that love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.

Let your God—
Love you.

Edwina Gateley

Postlude

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

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NEWS AND NOTICES