

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



19 JUNE 2022
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST



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

How beautiful...

How beautiful are the sad and those who sorrow
for they will find joy.

How beautiful are those without hope
for they will find faith.

How beautiful are those in constant pain
for they shall again find ease.

How beautiful are the homeless
for they will find refuge.

How beautiful are the wheeler-dealer powerful
for they will rejoice in service.

How beautiful are the clever and smart
for they will acknowledge what they do not know.

How beautiful are the weak
for they shall move mountains.

How beautiful are those who are despised and rejected
for they will be valued and embraced.

How beautiful are our neighbours
for they shall be the face of God to us.

Lord of the unexpected
and the upside-down;
maker of minus into plus
up-ender of schemes and cunning plans;
undeserved redeemer,
be with us now,
and help us learn your way.

Make us beautiful
... in your sight.

Teach us to regret, dear Lord.

Teach us to regret
not so much
our huge transgressions
but those we know
that live with us daily.
For them
we would seek
divine and forgiving love.

Teach us to regret, dear Lord,
the little things that passed un-noticed;
too numerous to list;
not inscribed on stone,
but etched corrosively
in miniature
upon my secret soul;

Teach us to regret, dear Lord,
the day we didn't say goodbye;
the time we didn't hear a call for help.
Teach us to regret that angry word,
contemptuous look,
dismissive scowl,
pursed lips.

Teach us to regret
our overweening, preening self-regard
and greed;
our power-lust, pomposity,
disregard,
d disdain, judgement,
hubris, assumptions
and refusal to forgive.

Teach us to regret, my Lord,
opportunities passed by,
to hear your Word,
to speak your Word,
to wrestle with your Word,
to add our words to yours;
to make of them
a mighty fortress
or humble home.

Teach us to regret,
and forgive, dear Lord,
forgive.

8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 103:8-12

Scripture

From the Hebrew scriptures

Kings 19:8-15a

8 He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. 9 At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' 10 He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

Elijah Meets God at Horeb

11 He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' 14 He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' 15 Then the Lord said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.'

From the New Testament

Luke 8:26-39

Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac

26 Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'— 29 for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) 30 Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. 31 They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

32 Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35 Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 37 Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Reflection

Dealing with demons

The sounds of silence

The lectionary for today serves up for us two stories: one of a man in a cave beset by the sound of wind and earthquake and fire; the other of a man beset by his inner demons. Both stories end in near silence — the man in the first story hears "a gentle and quiet whisper" and a command to speak truth to evil, while the man in the second story hears a gentle command to go home.

Different stories of course, but the drafters of the lectionary have decided that there is something to be gained from reading them together. The common theme, of course, is silence after tumult, and the gentle quiet whisper of redemption.

We don't have time to do justice to both stories, so I am asking you to take a walk with me on the wild side, in a cemetery, amongst the tombs. So:

Picture this

Walk with me for a while. What do you see? A naked man — trembling, wracked with convulsions, yelling and screaming, abusive, covered with cuts and sores — some of them self-inflicted. A crowd watches... fascinated. It's not a new sight for this crowd. They've seen it all before, but it does not lose its fascination. Some feel sorry for the man. Some feel judgemental. Some are grateful that it is him, and not them — "there but for the grace of God, go I".

We walk with Jesus. There's a whole bunch of us. We've been out on the water, but now we wander, following the Rabbi — unsure. How we ended up in the cemetery is a mystery, but the Rabbi knows best. The heat haze shimmers off the stony path. Why did we leave the cooling waters? There is a stench in the air; an air of decay. Over on the hillside a few guys herd some pigs. Why do they bother herding forbidden flesh? The pigs add to the air of corruption. And all the time the madman screams abuse at us and the Rabbi. Why does the Rabbi put up with this?

The Rabbi speaks a word of comfort to the man and is rewarded by a stream of obscenities. We strain to hear. The naked man seems to have more voices than one. Suddenly the swine herders join in the cacophony. The pigs are running wild. What has spooked them?

Looking back we see the naked man has calmed down. Whatever had run amok in his mind has calmed down. He has collapsed — at rest. Someone offers him a coat.

The crowd, now denied their spectacle, murmurs it's displeasure. Get out of here and take your magic with you. You are disrupting the *status quo*. Jesus whispers to the man. It might be best if he goes home. As for Jesus; he heads back to the boat — exhausted. We follow — bewildered.

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Look at this man again — with as much compassion as you can muster. Feel for his plight. He is subject to forces beyond his ken, and beyond his control. He is subject to forces with evil intent — beyond number — legion — like 5,000. He's lost count. He has been invaded.

Look at this man again and again. Let me challenge you to not only to see him, but to feel for him, to identify with him. My American friends have a suitable response to that: “Say what?” “Come again!” “Are you out of your mind?” Surely he and you are not cut from the same cloth. Feel sorry for him, yes. Identify with him — no way!

Yet, dare I say it, we are all haunted. We are all possessed. Well, I am anyway, and maybe you are too. My bunch of demons are armed with my regrets — regrets for feelings hurt, for damage done, for not offering a healing word, for leaving a friend in the lurch, for not loving enough, for raising expectations beyond my capacity to live up to them, for not having that last conversation or clearing up that nagging misunderstanding.

My bunch of demons are well and truly kitted out with my disappointments. Could I not have made a greater effort? Could I not have tried harder?

My demons are legion, and I have fed them well with the raw material for anguish and grief and that longing for second chances that will never come.

Oh yes, we are all possessed — some more than others. We cope of course — most of the time. If we're lucky we stay dressed in the *accoutrements* of respectability — but naked terror is never far away. If we're lucky we will not turn upon ourselves and engage in mental and spiritual self-harm.

Speaking for myself I used to be a crazy mixed-up kid. It's been a struggle to grow out of that. Am I there yet — afraid not!

Last week I talked about Martin Luther's anguish with his personal demons. This week I read about Mother Teresa. It seems that this saintly woman was constantly wracked by demons great and small. On learning about Mother Teresa's inner doubt, many of her fans asked how that could be. They had raised her up and placed her on a pedestal. They had made her into a saint. But Mother Teresa's response was that it was precisely those personal demons that enabled her to do what she did. They enabled her to identify. They enabled her to walk with the halt and the lame.

We need to remember too, that the Jesus we follow also confronted his demons, had his doubts, and suffered. That's the whole point of the incarnation. This Jesus whom we follow is the same Jesus that exorcised the demon-possessed man in that cemetery in Century Zero. The herd of pigs paid the price for that. The man went home to, presumably, a normal life. He, presumably,

would have a “normal” life, with a new set of home-made worries, and Jesus would continue his healing ministry.

It is this Jesus that we meet upon the rocky road of our faith. In the cave. In the cemetery. We need to ask him home for a cuppa and a chat, and hope he is not too put off by the state of the house. Perhaps he will grab a broom or a duster. Maybe he will order a skip and fill it with unneeded trash. Or maybe he won't care, and just enjoy our company.

May it be so.

Thanks be to God

Prayers – prepared by Diane Richter

As we pray for ourselves and others today, we acknowledge that we are all possessed of our personal turmoil and demons. We need to hear God's still small voice, just as Elijah did on the mountain. Let us pray:

Holy God,
You heard the cry of Elijah in his distress; be a sustaining presence to those we name in words and silence.

We lift before you those who carry heavy burdens - illness, homelessness, poverty, caring for family members, victims of violence and war, refugees, social isolation - those who find each day a challenge, those who struggle to see hope for the future.
Lord, you are the ultimate source of all hope.
Help us, your people, to bring hope, healing and light into the darkness today.

Lord, we lift before you those who carry heavy burdens of responsibility – for our leaders: local, national and around the world, thinking especially of leaders of Ukraine, Russia and Europe, whose decisions will affect the lives of many.
Give them wisdom and compassion, we pray.

Lord, we give you thanks for those with positions of leadership and responsibility in our Church, especially those who are preparing the upcoming meeting of the VicTas Synod.
May the spirit of truth and wisdom guide and protect all who serve, in whatever capacity, that your will may be done.

Healing, liberating, transforming God,
may we hear your still whisper in the midst of pain and suffering,
and may we respond with courageous tenderness to the needs around us,
as we follow the example of Christ Jesus, our teacher and Lord. Amen

Blessing

Circle us, Lord.
Keep protection near
And danger afar.

Circle us, Lord
Keep hope within.
Keep doubt without.

Circle us, Lord.
Keep light near
And darkness afar.

Circle us, Lord.
Keep peace within.
Keep evil out.

Thoughts for the week to come

I'M STILL HERE

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My looks are nothing special,
My face reveals my age,
My body shows some wear and tear,
And my energy's not the same.

Too often my memory fails me,
And I lose things all the time.
One minute I know what I plan to do,
And the next it may just slip my mind.

I try hard to avoid my mirror.
There are things I would rather not see,
And even those times when I just catch a glimpse,
I can no longer recognize me.

The things I used to do with ease
Can now cause aches and pains,
And the quality of the things I do
Will never be quite the same.

I always compare my older self
To those younger versions of me,
And I know I'm wasting too much time
Missing who I used to be.

But the thing that really makes me sad
Is despite what people see,
Underneath my tattered, worn out shell,
I'm still the same old me.

My heart can still feel endless love,
And at times it still can ache.
My heart can fill with so much joy,
And then it can suddenly break.

My soul can still feel sympathy
And longs for forgiveness and peace,
And there are times its light shines boldly through,
And times when it longs for release.

It's true, maybe now that I'm older,
Feeling lonely may be status quo,
But it also has made me more willing
To forgive and let past conflicts go.

So maybe to some I look ugly and old,
A person who barely exists.
I'm still quite aware of the beauty inside,
And my value should not be dismissed.

So although not as strong and no beauty, it's true,
I'm still here and want so much to live,
And I know that there's no one in this world quite like me,
And no one who has more to give.

Source: <https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/i-still-matter>

Postlude

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

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Music: Karen Roberts

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NEWS AND NOTICES