

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



26 JUNE 2022
PENTECOST 3 YEAR C
THE KEY FOR THE JOURNEY



ORDER OF WORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

From before recorded time, the First Peoples cared for this Land. We praise the Creator for the beauty of this Land and honour those who have offered themselves in tending it. We acknowledge the Elders and communities who have told the sacred stories and nurtured faithfulness to the Creator. We ask God's blessing on those who continue to work for the healing and restoration of this Land and Her Communities

OPENING PRAYERS

Gracious God,
we give you thanks that Jesus 'set his face' toward Jerusalem to fulfill his destiny as our Saviour and the Saviour of the World. We thank you for his determination to tread your path to Jerusalem and the cross, on our behalf, despite our repeated failure to follow in his footsteps. When faced with rejection and many forces around him, he stood firm and faithful in the way you desired.

Thus, even though it seems to us that evil spreads like a virus,
and though it may feel naïve to resist it, bestow on us the faithfulness to believe that your spirit's fruit can satisfy a world that hungers for healing.

And so:

Wherever hatred and suspicion divide people and fragment communities,
we will pass on love.

Wherever sorrow and cynicism leave the dark stain of despair,
we will pass on joy.

Wherever violence and abuse shatter lives and destroy the earth,
we will pass on peace.

Wherever expediency and the quest for quick fixes create confusion and need,
we will pass on patience.

Wherever heartlessness and selfishness cause loneliness and exclusion,
we will pass on kindness.

Wherever evil and darkness steal away hope and integrity,
we will pass on goodness.

Wherever aggression and coercion remove freedom and playfulness,
we will pass on gentleness.

Wherever self-interest and shallowness undermine relationships and stability,
we will pass on faithfulness.

Wherever lawlessness and carelessness generate chaos and fear,
we will pass on self-control.

Prepare and strengthen us Lord for the road ahead.

Thus, despite our resistance to taking your journey through life, assure us that your strong arm always redeems your people.

We pray in the name of the One who has no home other than your all-encompassing love.

Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God calls us forward into God's realm, and encourages us with a love which never leaves us and which we can never lose no matter how hard we push back, no matter how often we forget, no matter how far we stray.

We need your forgiveness. We are lost without it.

Our sins are forgiven

Thanks be to God

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

Your Word, Oh Lord, is a lamp to our feet;

A light to our path

PSALM 77: 1-2, 11-20:

I cry aloud to God, aloud to God,

that he may hear me.

In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.

I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;

I will remember your wonders of old.

I will meditate on all your work,

and muse on your mighty deeds.

Your way, O God, is holy.

What god is so great as our God?

You are the God who works wonders;

you have displayed your might among the peoples.

With your strong arm you redeemed your people,

the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid;

the very deep trembled.

The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered;

your arrows flashed on every side.

The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the world;

the earth trembled and shook.

Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters;

yet your footprints were unseen.

You led your people like a flock

by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

GALATIANS 5: 1, 13-25:

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ¹⁵If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁶Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before:

those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

LUKE 9:51-62: Reader:– *translation in part by Eduard Schweizer*

⁵¹When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to journey to Jerusalem. ⁵²And he sent messengers ahead of him. And they journeyed on and entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³but they did not receive him, because he was journeying toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” ⁵⁵But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶Then they journeyed on to another village. ⁵⁷As they were journeying along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” ⁵⁹To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” ⁶²Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

SERMON

The key for the Journey

Life is full of journeys; real and metaphorical, journeys which shape us!

Can you think of a journey – actual or metaphorical - which has shaped you in some way or another?

Give it a little thought and can I suggest sharing something of that journey or journeys, over a cuppa with a friend.

Our reading from Luke today is the first in a long section of the gospel — virtually 10 whole chapters – and it is called the journey narrative.

It focusses on the journey of Jesus to his ultimate destination: Jerusalem, and the cross!

The language of ‘journey,’ dominates our reading: the word itself occurs 5 times and there are 8 references to taking a trip, going somewhere, being sent.

‘go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.’

But the problem for us disciples/followers of Jesus is that there seems to be endless obstacles that get in the way of our Christian Journey; that get in the way of us, ‘setting our face to go to Jerusalem.’

Mardie and I took a journey this week to Adelaide, to attend the funeral of my sister-in-law, Kaye. I did not particularly want to go. I had lots of excuses as to why the journey was too difficult: Let me list them

1. I was not very well.
2. I would be going into a social situation which was/is quite difficult and testing – Kaye and Pete broke up many years ago and he died 10 years ago.
3. If I am brutally honest, I did not like Kaye much.

4. The journey was going to cost a fair bit.

Pretty good excuses, hey!?

Then my conscience was pricked by Mardie. 'Ron, we have to make this journey, we have to go, so that we can offer our support to Lisa and Jo and their families.' (Kaye and Pete's remaining children – their other two children have died.) So, off we went on the journey.

The question this passage raises for us is: 'How might we learn to name and deal with those blockages that debase, derail and destroy genuine Christian journey?'

In our Galatians reading Paul lists some pretty obvious retardants to Christian journey - 'fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.'

Phew! I am glad I have never been involved with any of them! HMMMM!

There are also those barriers to Christian journey that are not so obvious; deeper matters of a lack of faithfulness that 'blind-side' us!

For example, self-righteousness, often accompanied with searing judgement of others.

Such is the reaction of James and John to the Samaritan Village's lack of hospitality towards Jesus.

'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them!?'

Oh, me oh my!

This is not just an example of self-righteousness, it exhibits racial profiling and condemnation of their hated neighbours - the Samaritans!

But of course we would never be like that! Would we?

And because Jesus loves his disciples, he rebukes them for not taking the critical journey with him and he resumes that critical journey!

Luke highlights 3 other self-justifications for avoiding the journey

First up:

'I'll follow you Jesus!'

'Great, my daughter, my son, my friend, my disciple – but just remember it isn't going to be easy, because my calling involves being 'on the road': on the road to Jerusalem – and you lot (point to the congregation) know what that means! Leaving the excess baggage – travelling light – destination focussed. Are you still up for the journey?'

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

'I'll follow you Jesus! But.... look this is quite embarrassing. I'm sure you will understand! I've got this pressing obligation to deal with. It's really tough! My father died. You understand, I've got to do the right thing by him, by the family and by the community! I'm sure you'll agree with me taking that journey first!'

'Ah my daughter, my son, my friend, my disciple – remember my Kingdom embraces the dead in the unsurpassed love of God, as well as the living. Let the dead bury the dead and journey with me in the proclamation of that which truly gives life – even in death: my Father's love and his Kingdom!'

Now are up for the journey?

“Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

‘I’ll follow you Jesus! But, I’m a dedicated family man and we’ve got a very special family celebration happening, and all my friends will be there too. I’ll catch up with you on the road, after the festivities.’

‘Ah my daughter, my son, my friend, my disciple – there is always going to be something on, something happening, something pressing. Unless you make your supreme priority: devotion to my Kingdom and proclaiming of the Kingdom, you are always going to be looking over your shoulder- not really ‘on the journey!’

“No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

There WILL BE multiple times on our journeys through life when we have to choose: my way, our way OR the path to our Jerusalems – God’s way! On many occasions the two will coincide. On many occasions they will not.

As we heard there are many obstacles, many seductive side tracks, many paths of avoidance. Some external, some internal, and some external and internal.

Let me share another recent journey choice.

One of the ‘villages’ on my journey to Jerusalem is the village of Sustainability.

I have just finished reading David Attenborough’s book ‘A Life on our Planet – My Witness Statement and a Vision for the Future,’ – an absolutely astonishing and disturbing book - which concludes with a remarkable section: a wonderful word picture of the real possibility of humanity living in a sustainable and equitable relationship with the natural world (unlike what we are doing now). And reading it led me to a Mountain top experience of affirmation ‘YES, YES, YES!’ BUT, always a ‘but’, on later contemplation, sinking into the deepest valley of despair – ‘how can this ever be, how in the name of goodness, in this broken shattered world, can this ever be?!’ I think I’ll skip the Sustainability village.

However, the question is not one primarily of what is the solution to the problem? Which was my pre-occupation! But one of faithfulness! Faithfulness! One of being willing, no matter what, to be a pilgrim - not just to talk the talk but to walk the walk, with Jesus – especially when the road there seems impassable and impossible.

Walter Brueggemann throws some light on this passage as he comments

“While there is a metaphorical quality about Luke’s language (for example, “Let the dead bury their own dead”), it nevertheless sharply confronts the family-oriented social system of the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds with the critical nature of discipleship.

The translation to the contemporary setting [our setting] must somehow not water down the rigor and severity of Jesus’ demands. Accommodation to social structures rather than separation from them, divided loyalties rather than single-mindedness, are more likely to characterize modern Christians.

Jesus’ words continue to challenge, prod, and even anger today’s followers and would-be followers.’

So, are WE – YOU and ME - up for the journey?

HIS journey – Jesus’ journey - not our concoction of how we think we ought to travel, and where we ought to travel and with whom we ought to travel, and what we do on our travels, and deciding to go another way when his journey gets too rough.

His journey – to Jerusalem, and all that entails!

A final word

Despite OUR half-hearted faith and blindness of belief, Jesus himself, still faithfully journeys to Jerusalem. He is the KEY.

He continues his journey to Jerusalem, to rejection, to death at our hands and then, astonishingly to new life: amazing grace for all AND despite our broken and botched discipleship, Jesus still calls us to follow him on that road to Jerusalem. The road to authentic life. Amazing love! Amazing Grace!

He is the KEY. That’s all that really matters

One last thing: David and Heather’s current message on the notice board, highlights the key to sustaining our journey.

‘The fullness of God travels with us, a gift for all.’

May it be so

Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Mardie Townsend

Let us pray

Loving, liberating God, long ago you delivered your people from slavery, and you call your people today on your journey to freedom: hear our prayers for the world and for the church.

We pray for the well-being of this fragile planet:
for the preservation of its natural treasures; for the wise use and the just sharing of its resources.
As we journey through your wonderful creation, release us from the tyranny of greed, that we may know the freedom of those who are satisfied by simple things and be inspired to live sustainably.

Liberating God, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for the peoples of the world:
for all who endure terrorism, war or any kind of strife; for prisoners of conscience and all who suffer persecution or torture.
Release your people from the oppression of violence and injustice, that they may be allowed to walk free from care and to live in peace.

Liberating God, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for the worldwide church:
for all who commit their lives to your service; for all who bring your love to others in this place.

May we know the freedom of those who delight to do your will. Set us and those we serve on the path of freedom's journey, that we may joyfully and faithfully share the good news of your love.

Liberating God, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for those with whom we share our lives:
for the needy of this community, and for all who are our neighbours; for our families and friends
and for those who we find it difficult to love.

Release us from the bonds of selfishness, that we may know the freedom of those with generous
and forgiving hearts and may journey together joyfully.

Liberating God, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for those in trouble or distress:
for the lonely, the sorrowing and those who have no hope; for the sick and the dying and for all
who ease their pain.

Release us all from the grip of anxiety and fear, that we may continue life's journey in the
knowledge of your unending love.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread and 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**

SENDING OUT AND BLESSING

Go now, and proclaim the reign of God.
Do not let bodily desires enslave you,
but live by the Spirit.
Use your freedom to grow in love for one another.

And may God reach out to you and save you;
May Christ Jesus give you a double portion of his Spirit;
And may the Holy Spirit bear fruit within you
and guide you in all your ways.

Amen.

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WORD OF MISSION

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
We will journey under the power of God's love. Alleluia!

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Opening prayers: Sacredise*

Postlude

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

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Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS AND NOTICES

