

# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



14 AUGUST 2022  
PENTECOST 10



# 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

Show us...

Show us, good Lord!  
Show us a better world;  
a world long coming.

Show us the rule of love;  
shaping, guiding, framing, enabling  
our lives each day.

Show us what it looks like  
to be in the world, but not of the world;  
serving, sharing, seeking.

Show us the majesty and mystery  
of creation born in a flash  
yet formed and forming — wonder-full.

Show us ways forward  
along paths hard to follow  
without guidance.

Show us how to read the scriptures  
chronicling our growing understanding  
of what it means to be children of God.

Show us what it is like  
to be made in your image, good Lord  
and help us to translate outward show into action.

Grant us, good Lord, the self-knowledge to admit to our wrongdoings great and small;  
our habitual forgetting to carry each others' burdens,  
to share our cloaks of plenty,  
to love our neighbour not for reward but for goodness and for God-ness sake;  
for grasping more than we need,  
for judging others harshly when we forget our own messiness.

Show us forgiveness, Lord.  
Renew daily your promise of new life.  
Give us a new beginning — a new chance to make good;  
to rise to new potential  
and to walk with Jesus.

## HYMN: TIS572, O thou who camest from above...

### Scripture

Luke 12:49-56

49 "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51 Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52 From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53 they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." 54 He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. 55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

## HYMN: TIS398, Come down, O Love divine...

### Reflection

**... why do you not know how to interpret the present time?**

**From Luke**

*54-56 Then he turned to the crowd: "When you see clouds coming in from the west, you say, 'Storm's coming'—and you're right. And when the wind comes out of the south, you say, 'This'll be a hot one'—and you're right. Frauds! You know how to tell a change in the weather, so don't tell me you can't tell a change in the season, the God-season we're in right now. (Translation: The Message)*

I guess that people have always talked about the weather, and they have always tried to predict what the weather will be like — particularly in agrarian societies, for obvious reasons.

In our times weather forecasting has become more and more precise and more and more reliable. When I was a kid we took note of what was happening in Perth and deduced that in five days we, in Melbourne, would get the same weather. Of course, that was sometimes the case, and sometimes it was not. Now we have a weather science (meteorology) and we have a much greater degree of confidence in its predictions.

[look at today's forecast if you have it available]

So what does the science of weather involve?

### **1. Close attention to phenomena, and record-keeping.**

Watching the wind, rain and temperature, and the spin of the earth. Devising better and better instruments, and better and more precise language, and more reliable ways of keeping records.

### **2. Precedents.**

Paying attention to what happened in the past. Remembering that when A and B and C happened then D followed — and noting the occasions when D didn't follow, but E did.

### **3. Theories.**

These days we talk a lot about modelling. What we mean by that is that we try to think of the whole complex system over time and work out what influences what. Those theories, or models, are constantly tested and refined. The major conceptual exercise is to discover instances where the model does not work out for us. In the philosophy of science we refer to constant attempts to falsify theories. That's the way science works. You develop an idea about how things work, and then you set about seeing if there are any circumstances under which that is **not** the case.

### **4. Revising.**

When you come to the conclusion that things don't work out the way you expected them to you revise (improve) your model and do it all again.

It's the same in theology. We no longer look solely at what is happening in the theological equivalent of Perth. We understand that there's a long distance between Perth and Melbourne — between the first century and the 21st century.

So, when Jesus chastises his audience (his little flock) and demands that they read the signs of the time, we can no longer read this as a demand that we read the signs of **his** times, horrendous as those were. Jesus' time was pre-feudal — a time of oppressive empire, of universal slavery, of concepts of ritual and purity which were in the control of a priestly class, and designed for their benefit, of illiteracy, of low life-expectancy and child labour, of the subservience of women.

We, surely, must read our times with the tools and techniques of **our** times — just as we read the weather now with the tools and techniques of meteorology. Let's apply those tools and techniques to reading the signs of **our** times :

#### **1. We need to pay close attention, and keep records.**

The winds of our time blow from all directions — from quarters undreamed of in Jesus' time. In the lifetime of everyone in this building today we have seen warfare on a scale beyond imagining. We have seen the conquest of much disease, but also it's resurgence on a massive international scale. We are at once more secure, and more insecure. We are buried beneath avalanches of information — bewildering in its scope and intensity. Sometimes it seems that the more we know, the less we understand. We communicate more easily and over vast distances, and in ever-decreasing intervals if time.

#### **2. Precedents.**

It is truly said that those who ignore history are in danger of repeating the mistakes of the past. History is massively important, yet the writing and reading of history has become a lost art for many. The past has become the plaything of generations impressed more by propaganda than by analysis. Theology is not immune to this. Woolly thinking has meant that the fine art of discerning

the will of God, has become about as reliable as reading tealeaves or the entrails of frogs. We have become accustomed to carving up the holy scripture into increasingly fragmented "texts", each of which is said to illuminate the shape of the present, and the meaning thereof.

### **3. Theories.**

If any single thing can be said to characterise church-talk in these times is its reduction to a rag bag of competing discourses, all of which claim divine authority. It is a strange thing, that these days it is easier to engage in a discussion with Hindus than it is with Catholics or Pentecostals. Interfaith dialogue, it seems to me, has a much better chance of making progress than does ecumenical dialogue. And here's another thing: I am coming across more and more "spiritual-but-not-religious" folk whose understanding of "faith" is content-free — not required to be encumbered by a God, or Jesus.

### **4. Revising.**

Our faith, if it is to be true both to past-time and present-time, must be in a constant state of revision. You may be a bit offended if I say it must be updated, but by that I don't mean it needs to be modernised. What I mean is that our faith needs to be constantly refined by truth tests — by the posing of questions. Last week I engaged in a little personal experiment. I asked myself if it might be possible to preach a sermon made up entirely of questions. I half expected the roof to fall in, but instead I got a fair bit of positive feedback.

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But having said all that, and urging you to explore the theological landscape in the manner of theological meteorologists, the time has come for the punch line. I am sure that Jesus really wanted his followers (and us) to understand their time and to respond appropriately, but he was also saying that through his coming the game had changed. The Kingdom had arrived. The oppressive landscape of society required understanding and response, but there was a heaven-sent intrusion that had to be understood. This new dispensation would change everything. It was not, is not, visible, but there is a powerful force abroad.

#### **...why do you not know how to interpret the present time?**

It could be that we need a bit more faith — to make the invisible, visible; to make the weak strong; to speak truth in the face of falsehood; to make rough places plain; to usher in the reign of love, compassion, solidarity, charity, hospitality — a new way (a Jesus way)

**HYMN: TIS409, O breath of life, come sweeping through us...**

## Prayer – prepared by Dianne Richter

*Let us pray with one voice for all the people of God including those who cannot, or will not, pray for themselves.*

Let us pray for the leaders of our Church, clergy, lay and religious. May they find the peace of Christ even when their beliefs and leadership bring division. Strengthen them in their faith as they lead us.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

We pray for peace in the world wherever there is division and violence. Bring an end to hatred and hostility and bring people to live together as children of your one human family.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

We pray for world leaders. May they always seek wisdom from people who truly aim to serve their people.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

United Nations International Day For The World's Indigenous People was this week, with a focus on the role of indigenous women in the preservation and transmission of traditional knowledge.

We pray for our First Nations women leaders, Aunties, and heroines who have enabled the survival of language and custom, creating 'home' and 'family' in challenging and vulnerable spaces, even while suffering disrespect, violence, and dispossession of Country.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

Let us pray for all those suffering from the effects of war, poverty and the pandemic. May they find the help they need from agencies who can reach them and may we always be generous in supporting those efforts.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

Let us pray for those who struggle to believe. May they find companions to journey with them as they seek to come to faith in God.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

We pray for our own community. When the needs of our faith come into conflict with our wants may we find the strength to follow Christ in love.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

We pray for those who care for the poor, the unwell and the unloved in our own community. May they be strengthened in faith and may we be generous as we support their vocation.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

We pray for those who have died recently and for those who mourn their loss. May we all find ways to show care and love to those who grieve.

*Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer***

Lord God, we ask that you give the whole church wisdom in reading the signs of the times, and skill in making your truth and love known in the world today. Make our own endeavours at outreach and witness bear fruit Lord, in your name. Amen

# HYMN: TIS690, Beauty for brokenness...

## Blessing

Now our worship time is over.

We have listened.

We have spoken.

We have recognised the worth of our community.

We have committed ourselves again

to a life of service and compassion and love.

Now we go out from here in hope,

determined to walk this week and in all of our weeks to come

in the Jesus Way — guided by the Holy Spirit.

Be with us, we pray

and shower us with undeserved blessings

so that we will be true to all that was said and done

during this precious hour.

## Word Of Mission

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord In the name of Christ. Amen

# Thoughts for the week to come

Creator and Nurturer,  
we call to you in these shadowy days.  
The warmth of your sun is cooled by our dissonance and unkindness.  
The light of your rays is shadowed by our foggy, anxious, confused ways.  
The growth in your love is stunted by our inflexibility and hard boundaries.  
We have built 'towers' to guard and uphold our desires  
that have instead, slowed the spread of your passionate, radical discipleship.  
We have taken to ourselves that which is not ours to own.  
Your vineyard is not as well tended as it could be.  
We are so sorry, God of all,  
for we have neglected your Way and trampled on shoots of new life.  
Our greed, our anxieties, our fear of new things and change  
have allowed or adapted with your evolving and everchanging world.  
We have not reflected on the natural seasonal cycle  
of flourishing life letting-go to death,  
so that life may begin in a new season again.  
We seek your guidance, your passion, your breath of fresh air,  
so that, we, your Churches, prune well  
and discard that which is not life-giving in our ways.  
Help us to let all that has been pruned  
to be turned over and composted,  
teaching us what is nourishing  
and what we need to leave behind.  
May we be willing workers in your vineyard  
and with the great cloud of witnesses,  
pray that season after season bears fruit and nourishes your world.

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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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