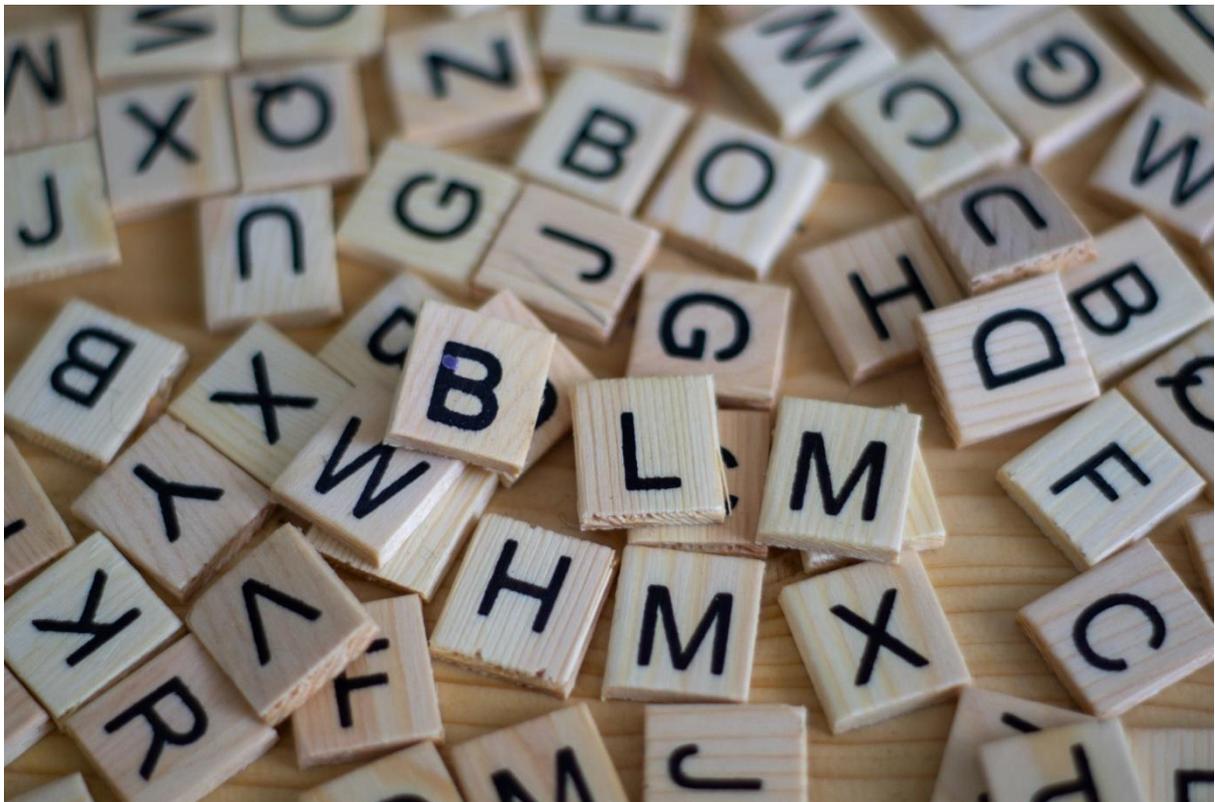


# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



21 AUGUST 2022  
PENTECOST 11



# 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

### **The Slow Work of God**

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are, quite naturally, impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip  
the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on  
the way to something unknown;  
something new,

And yet it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through  
some stages of instability ---  
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you, my God.  
Your ideas mature gradually ---  
Let them grow,  
Let them shape themselves,  
without undue haste.

Let us not try to force them on,  
as though we could be today  
what time will make us tomorrow.

Only you, my God could say what this new spirit  
gradually forming within us will be.

Grant us the benefit of believing  
that God's hand is leading us,

helping us to accept the anxiety of  
feeling ourselves in suspense and incomplete.

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And we open our souls today,  
full of regrets, but growing each day in courage  
to overcome that part of us which drags us down,  
and lifting up that part which spurs us on.

For we have heard the promise,  
that the unconditional love of our God  
will deliver to us forgiveness,  
and the promise of new life.

## Hymn: TIS121, God himself is present...

### Scripture

#### Jeremiah 1:4-10

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' 6 Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' 7 But the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.' 9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.'

#### Luke 13:10-17

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11 And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." 15 But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untye his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

## Hymn: TIS554, If we will trust in God to guide us...

# Reflection on Jeremiah 1:5-6

*Truly I do not know how to speak (NRSV)*

*A prophet to the nations— that’s what I had in mind for you.” 6 But I said, “Hold it, Master GOD! Look at me. I don’t know anything. I’m only a boy!” (The Message)*

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## Some questions to think about:

- Have you ever had a call — from God, that is? An almighty call that is out of the blue, totally unexpected. If so, what was it like?
- Or would you claim to have had a calling? Did you feel that you were always meant to do what you ended up doing; that your destiny was mapped out in advance.
- Would you ascribe/blame God for your calling.
- Or were you ever caught unawares by a surprising turn of events and found yourself heading in a new and unexpected direction?
- Is it useful to talk about being called by God.
- Is there ever a downside to being called by God.
- Can you prepare yourself for God’s call?
- Are some people better suited to getting calls from God? Do you think of the as holy or saintly.

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Today’s reading from the Hebrew scriptures draws our attention to the call (or commissioning) of the prophet-to-be Jeremiah. In a conversational tone, as between friends, God informs Jeremiah that he is to go and tell some really powerful people that their behaviour is not up to scratch, and they had better get their act together — or else. Or else what? Or else some seriously bad folk from Babylon are going to act on God’s behalf and seriously disrupt their lifestyle — even to the extent of deporting many of them to a strange and foreign place.

“No way, God”, responds Jeremiah. “What do I know? I’m not prepared. What can I say?” “No worries”, says God. “I’ll put the right words into your mouth”. So Jeremiah goes, and delivers his unpopular message, and gets roundly abused and beaten up for his trouble. Nothing changes! One might think that Jeremiah has failed. It certainly looks that way. And the Babylonians come and wreak havoc. And there is exile, and much weeping. Jeremiah, though not exiled, weeps too. He hides away — and waits...

Jeremiah goes down in history as the guy who weeps. Jeremiah becomes synonymous with lament. Even today Jeremiah’s name can be a form of abuse — and we talk about extended complaint as a Jeremiad.

What can we learn from Jeremiah’s call?

- It was unexpected.
- It was uncalled for.
- It made no sense.
- It led to a lot of pain and grief.
- Nothing much changed.

So, what's the point? Why take the story seriously? Why talk about it in church?

Maybe there's no point at all. Unless...

Unless, perhaps, that it puts life into perspective. Unless it puts our reforming efforts into perspective. Unless it puts our brave talk about social justice into perspective. Unless we understand what a call from God is like.

Some of us go through life not hearing God's voice — I mean hearing it like you are hearing me today, in this place, at this time, loud and clear. I mean, hearing it like Jeremiah did? Others do hear the voice of God with that sort of clarity — and tell of it in wonder; and relate how it sent them off in a new direction, on a new quest or a new life. But there are those among us who have to struggle to discern the voice of God amidst the noise and clatter of everyday life. We pray, but the responses we hear are unclear, distant, indistinct. We ask for help. We appeal for mercy. We beg for forgiveness. Far too often our prayers seem to fall on deaf ears. Our religious leaders urge us on; tell us we are not trying hard enough, but we seem to be playing a game with ever-diminishing returns.

And, of course, we may hear clearly, but still get it wrong, just as I may think I am projecting my message clearly, but you may be receiving quite a different message. Communication between us humans can be very complicated. How much more complicated might be our communications with God?

Sometimes we look at the trajectories of our lives and hope, by careful attention, to work out what is happening between us and God. Sometimes our lives seem to be a muddle — without direction, going nowhere fast; then, out of the blue so to speak, there is a moment of clarity, and we feel driven to recognise the hand of God, or the voice of God or (the scariest of all) the call of God. I say the call of God is scary, because responding to it has, often as not, horrendous consequences. Let me share my own experience of such a call.

It is the early 1960s I am recently married — wife, two children. A new house. A good job. I am driving home from work. A thought breaks in. Wouldn't it be good to be a minister!

No way!

I thrust the thought into the back of my mind, but over days and weeks and months it broke free and reasserted itself. The idea filled out. I saw myself preaching to congregations amazed by my learning and wisdom. I saw myself bringing comfort to lonely and the distressed. I saw myself righting wrongs. I saw myself leading a church triumphant.

Yeah! Right!

Finally, I gave up, and talked it through with my wife. The consequences of responding to what I started to think of as a call were horrendous to say the least. Among them were:

- Giving up a well-paid job.
- Selling the house.
- Intensive study.
- Moving to a new place.
- and so on.

The impact on my wife, and kids was dramatic, to say the least. To this day I marvel at the incredibly generous way my wife accepted what was happening — but that acceptance should not gloss over the very real sacrifices entailed by those nearest and dearest to me.

We need to think about this when we blithely talk about calls in the context of our faith. Some of us may glorify in responding to the essentially private communications from God. Some of us may even revel in the glory of it all — look at me; look at my sacrifice; look at what I have given up for the greater glory of God. Not so often will we admit to the sacrifices of others — my sacrifices of others not privy to my communications with the almighty.

The consequences of this call haunt me still. How could I, in the name of the Almighty cause such disruptions in the lives of those not privy to my deal with God? I can reason my way through it, of course. I can do the math. I can add up the goods and array them alongside the bads. I can argue that it all worked out in the end — I am here, in Ormond, am I not? But the fact is that I am not in a position to evaluate my life. It is surely the case that such evaluations are best left to a higher power. Most of us live as best we can. We are fortunate if we have left the world in even slightly better shape than it was when we entered it.

The lesson from all of this to be careful. As with Jeremiah, calls are often

- unexpected.
- uncalled for.
- make no sense.
- lead to a lot of pain and grief.
- may be disappointing.

God's way is not an easy way. We are honoured if we are invited to get on board God's bandwagon, but it's not an easy ride, and the destination is rarely what we expect.

We are on such a ride right now in this church. We are planning. Soon we will be building. What an act of faith will that building be!. But no matter how much we plan, and no matter how many earnest and worthy thoughts we put on paper, the outcome will be unexpected – not quite what we planned for, not something we fully understand, involving a fair bit of stress and strain and may seem less than we might have hoped for. But if we are lucky the Babylonians won't come and we may avoid an extended time by the rivers of Babylon and our tears may be few. Perhaps, just perhaps, Jeremiah will smile again.

May it be so.

## Hymn: TIS658, I, the Lord of sea and sky...

## Prayers – prepared by Marg Davis

Today, August 21, is International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism and their families

This observance was established by the United Nations and has occurred on August 21, since 2017, with the aim of increasing action, and awareness, to enable the needs of these people to be addressed

### **Let us Pray**

Gracious God- we pray for peace in places of violence and for those who are victims of atrocities too numerous to mention. We pray for refugees and ask that you bring them comfort in their insecurity, peace in their distress and hope in their desolation.

We pray for indigenous people, who have been mistreated, and overlooked, for so long.

Dear Lord we ask you to guide leaders- globally and in Australia, so that they may be more aware, and compassionate, towards all who are weighed down by oppression, tyranny and hardship.

Living, liberating God, we pray for your church throughout the world and we ask that you guide us

to be open to your spirit of truth so that we may live our lives in your grace and mercy.

In our prayers we remember all who are in special need of your comfort – including those who are

sick, sad, lonely, scared, grieving, anxious and uncertain. Help them to feel your loving presence.

We give thanks for all who provide care and assistance – paid and unpaid. We know they should be more valued and always treated with respect.

We pray for people in our own communities and those within our Church at Ormond and also for family and friends and we pause to offer special mention of those known to us personally.....

God of all creation, hear our prayers and grant your blessing on all people

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***

Hymn: TIS677, Christ's is the world in which we  
move...

## 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.

## Word Of Mission

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

# Thoughts for the week to come

*Thee, God, I come from, to Thee I go*

THEE, God, I come from, to thee go,  
All day long I like fountain flow  
From thy hand out, swayed about  
Mote-like in thy mighty glow.

What I know of thee I bless,  
As acknowledging thy stress  
On my being and as seeing  
Something of thy holiness.

Once I turned from thee and hid,  
Bound on what thou hadst forbid;  
Sow the wind I would; I sinned:  
I repent of what I did.

Bad I am, but yet thy child.  
Father, be thou reconciled.  
Spare thou me, since I see  
With thy might that thou art mild.

I have life before me still  
And thy purpose to fulfil;  
Yea a debt to pay thee yet:  
Help me, sir, and so I will.

But thou bidst, and just thou art,  
Me shew mercy from my heart  
Towards my brother, every other  
Man my mate and counterpart.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)

## 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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