

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



4 SEPTEMBER 2022

PENTECOST 13



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.

Hymn: TIS 472 Father of mercy...

Prayer for today

A reflection on Jeremiah 18:1-11

How was I formed, dear Lord
and when and why?
Was I once an idea;
a divine inspiration
or perhaps a mere cosmic plaything;
a pastime to while away
the tedium of eternity.

Or, were the billions upon billions
of elements and particles and waves
that now make up the mind-full entity
that is ME (and YOU) always meant to give hint upon hint
that a great consciousness and a great purpose
is afoot in this mighty universe;
that there is a direction if not a plan.

And were we, gathered here,
always meant to listen, speak and sing
in a sacred discourse on matters
we understand only partly
and which we see but dimly — as through a darkened glass?
Is our purpose to love where we have come from
and where we are going — and our companions on the journey?

Will those bits and pieces that make us up;
born by happy accident in stars long gone
be cast wide again to make from us
more wonders.

And we, whose existence is privileged
and who have the honour to strive
to live up to what we are and what we can be;
may we admit to not always living up to the challenge
and letting our collective kind down.
We are pleased to be assured that all is not lost;
that new starts are possible,
that we can be forgiven
again and again.

Hymn: TIS 647 Comfort, comfort all my people...

Scripture

Jeremiah 18:1-11

The Potter and the Clay

18The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2‘Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ 3So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

5 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 6Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. 7At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. 9And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. 11Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

Psalm 139:1-5 The Inescapable God

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
3 You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
5 You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

Luke 14:25-33

The Cost of Discipleship

25 Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, 26“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. 27Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” 31Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

A Pastoral Letter: Number One

Just for a while, rather than simply repeat the sermon from the church-based service, I have decided to offer the folks not able to attend the service a special tailored “pastoral letter” for their prayerful consideration. The overall theme, for a while, will be The Lord’s Prayer, and today we will look at the first two words: Our Father.

Looking at The Lord’s Prayer — Our Father:

Is God a problem for you? Do you wonder if he really exists, and what he might be like? Is he a personal God—which is to say, is he a God who knows about you, and cares about you? Can the creator of absolutely everything, big and small, care about you and me. The Church says an emphatic “Yes!” to all of that, but sometimes, even often, we get a sneaky little feeling that we are not quite sure about who or what God is. Then, we may shove our doubts “on the back burner” and let them simmer away. Or we may turn up the heat on our doubts and see what happens.

The fact is that nobody knows everything that can be known about God. Anyone who claims to have secret insider information is a charlatan or a crook. Knowledge of God is gained through hard work—through prayer, through contemplation, through study, through paying attention to the tradition, through study of The Scriptures in which the gradual self-revelation of God is exposed in fits and starts culminating in the life and teachings of Jesus who dares to call his God “Abba” or “Daddy”.

If we follow Jesus and his daddy we are probably on the right track. That picture of God as the model father is a good one to keep at the forefront of our minds. At times we are tempted to think of God as the mighty king, or the stern judge, or the one who berates us for our slips-up or misdeeds, rather than the one who picks us up when we fall, who gives us a cuddle, who puts us back on our feet, who allows us new beginnings.

Today we talked about these things in church. We reached no firm conclusions. We didn’t have to. But we shared ideas and feelings and insights, and that is important. And we also heard from the prophet Jeremiah, as he likened God to a potter, shaping and re-shaping the lives of persons and nations. And we heard from Psalm 139 which gives God credit for every little bit of our lives. Finally we heard from Jesus, telling us in no uncertain terms that God’s way is a hard way and

that much is expected of disciples. It's a grim dark world out there. It looks rosy, but it has a dark underbelly, and it can consign us to fear and loneliness and despair.

But after that, in church, we shared the mystic feast of the Lord's Supper. This is what The Gospel is all about — fellowship, redemption, rising above the darkness, embracing the gracious offer of new life... together. And you, my friend, though you were not there, were part of that.

Karel Reus (Minister)

Hymn: TIS 536 An upper room did our Lord prepare...

Prayers — prepared by Ron Townsend

RESPONSE:

You are the Potter, we are the clay,
shape and reshape us, as seems good to you

PREAMBLE:

*A soft lump being formed upon
a spinning wheel:
rising
falling
widening
drooping lopsided,
wet clay shaped by the potter's hand
worked
reworked
changed, turned,
crafted to be vessels.*

Let us pray.

O God, you know us
as intimately as a potter
knows the clay within her hands.

Know our hearts and hear the prayers
that are within us.

We ache for peace.
We yearn for vision and certainty
amidst so much mystery, amidst so much chaos.
We strain toward you. We collapse. We want
someone to hold this life – our life - together.

You are the Potter, we are the clay,
shape and reshape us, as seems good to you

Master Potter, Loving God,
reveal and be love
in those places and to those people
who are suffering, sick, abused, and dying;

Reveal and be wisdom in all places of decision-making;

Reveal and be the fullness of strength in the ties that bind us, and
show us the cords that we, otherwise, have broken and abandoned.
Reveal and re-shape those who have only toyed with faith, and those who have slipped away
from the commitment they once had.

You are the Potter, we are the clay,
shape and reshape us, as seems good to you

Master Potter, Loving God, in your mercy, shape and re-shape those who are plunged into deep
grief or have not found the kind of healing they expected for loved ones or for themselves and
are angry with You, God, fearing that nothing on earth or in heaven can ever heal their broken
heart.

You are the Potter, we are the clay,
shape and reshape us, as seems good to you

Master Potter, Loving God, in your mercy, shape and re-shape the church when it prevaricates or
forgets its first love or dilutes the gospel to make it more palatable.

You are the Potter, we are the clay,
shape and reshape us, as seems good to you

Lord God, Master Potter;
make us vessels full of love,
receptive to your wisdom,
trusting in your grace so that our
formation – our transformation – in your hands
will take shape according to your glory.

We pray through Jesus – faithful Potter of New life
Amen.

Adapted from prayers by Bruce Prewer and Rachel Hackenberg

Hymn: TIS 531, Sent forth by God's blessing..

Blessing

The grace of the Word of life rest upon you;
the love of the Source of life embrace you;
and the transforming power of the Breath of life
help, strengthen and surprise you,
this day and all your days.

Amen.

Thoughts for the week to come

I'm growing old, Lord

The first verses of a prayer by Michel Quoist. From *Keeping Hope: Favourite Prayers for Modern Living*, Gill and Macmillan, 2014 (found on Kindle)

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I'm growing old, Lord,
 and growing old is hard!
I can't run any longer,
 I can't even walk fast.
I can no longer carry heavy weights
 or go upstairs quickly.
My hands have started to tremble
 and my eyes tire rapidly
 as they go through the pages of my book.
My memory is failing and obstinately hides
 dates and names
 that it knows quite well.

I'm growing old, and the links of affection,
 established over many long years,
 become slack, one by one,
 and sometimes they break.
So many of the people I know,
so many of the people I love,
go away and disappear
 into the distance
that my first glance at the daily newspaper
 becomes an anxious search through the death notices.

I find myself alone, Lord,
 a little more alone every day,
alone with my memories

and with past sorrows
that always remain
very much alive in my heart,
while many of the joys
seem to have taken flight.

Understand me, Lord!
You who burned up your existence
in thirty-three intense years,
you don't know what it's like to be growing old slowly
and to be there
while life escapes implacably
from this poor rusted body,
an old machine with grinding gears,
a machine that doesn't work;
and above all, to be there
waiting,
waiting for the time to pass,
time that passes so slowly on certain days
that it seems to be mocking me as it turns and drags,
before me,
around me,
refusing to yield to the approaching night
and finally allowing me ... to sleep.

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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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Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS AND NOTICES