

# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



11 SEPTEMBER 2022

PENTECOST 14



Image: KR

# 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 loss:

How should we deal with loss Good Lord? How should we deal with:

- A lost monarch
- Lost meaning
- Lost direction
- Lost hope
- Lost way
- Lost love
- Lost friend
- Lost child
- Lost place
- Lost opportunity
- Lost self-respect

Can we expect to balance the ledger by a simple, prayerful, appeal to your good will? Can we make up for losses by greater and greater generosity on our part?

Allow us to begin by considering times of good fortune and times when we saw you, felt you, knew you, held you close:

- That day when my true love first touched my hand.
- That hot afternoon when I plunged beneath a cooling wave.
- That closeness to the ultimate when I took in, for the first time that vista from a peak.
- Those mornings with a warm cuppa and some toast.
- That moment when my baby child first said “Dad” (or “Mum”).
- That time when my writer’s block was conquered by a flow of words.
- When I laughed in that movie until my sides split.

- When that sunset made me gasp.
- When that final bit of the jigsaw fell into place.
- When anger was overcome by joy.
- When I discovered a new friend.
- When I saw life through a microscope.
- When the magpie sang, and the dog barked, and a Bach cantata played, and my child laughed, and I cried for the sheer joy I felt.

Such moments surely balance out our multiple losses.

If we but pay attention good Lord,

the profit/loss statement of our lives may yet display healthy doses of black amidst the scattering of red.

We can lose

without being losers.

Help us keep that in mind, Lord.

Amen

## HYMN: TIS 547 Be thou my vision...

### Scripture

#### Psalm 14

#### Denunciation of Godlessness

<sup>1</sup> Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'

They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;  
there is no one who does good.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind

to see if there are any who are wise,  
who seek after God.

<sup>3</sup> They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse;

there is no one who does good,  
no, not one.

<sup>4</sup> Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers

who eat up my people as they eat bread,  
and do not call upon the LORD?

<sup>5</sup> There they shall be in great terror,

for God is with the company of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup> You would confound the plans of the poor,

but the LORD is their refuge.

<sup>7</sup> O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!  
When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people,  
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

## **Luke 15**

### **The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’

So he told them this parable: ‘Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

### **The Parable of the Lost Coin**

‘Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.” Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’

### **The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother**

Then Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’ ” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young

goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” ’

## A Pastoral Letter: Number Two

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 second two words: “in heaven”.

### **Looking at The Lord’s Prayer — In heaven:**

Who would blame you if you took the first line of The Lord’s Prayer at face value and assumed that God is far away in some place called “heaven”, sitting back on his throne, surrounded by angels of various shapes and sizes, and enjoying the cosmic view. That is, of course, if we forget the intimate personal God we talked about last week — the God Jesus recognised as his dad, and who dwells within each one of us.

Can we have a bet both ways here? Can our loving gracious friend also be the mighty ruler of all? Maybe so. Can the God who is responsible for bringing the cosmos into being also be my pal, my buddy, my friend and companion? Well, why not? That assumption has sustained many a faithful disciple since Jesus revealed it as true.

But we need to tread carefully here, because many of us have got caught up in the idea of “Heaven” as a place — a place that God is “in” and where, one day, we might be “in” too. And many of us have also got caught up with the idea that getting “in” is the most important thing ever — and that the way to get “in” is to be super good and to live up to the very high standards that this God sets for us. That proposition is, however, challenged by another key proposition of our faith, that God is love and that this love is generous, unbounded, unending and most importantly is unconditional.

Yes, God is transcendent and quite beyond our ken. In that sense God is in his heaven. But this God is near — as near as our breath, as near as our heartbeat. Our God is both near and far.

Last week I offered for your consideration the beginning of a prayer on old age by Michel Quoist. Today I offer the second part of that prayer. The final stanzas take the form of comments on old age from the point of view of Jesus and his mother. I guess that Jesus (in words that Quoist puts into his mouth) is encouraging acceptance – not resignation or giving up, but giving oneself over to quiet reflection. Old age is a great challenge, but it is also an opportunity to put life into some sort of perspective, and to ponder on a life we of advanced age can now devote to being true companions to both our personal God and our mighty creator God.

Karel Reus (Minister)

## HYMN: TIS 146 God who made the earth...

## Prayers – prepared by David Northwood

Our prayer today is based on the theme of the loss.

Lord we pray  
Hear our prayer today  
As we pray for others  
And for ourselves

These are our prayers for the people. As we pray for those who **have** lost and those who **are** lost.

Grief is a universal emotion in our species and even other species. Most of us have lost a parent, sibling, friend, spouse or child with the terrible grief that follows.

Others of us have lost a job, position, possessions and feel disoriented and disrupted.

There is a Jewish blessing of mourners that says:

Those who are worn out and crushed by this mourning, let your hearts consider this:  
this is the stream that has existed from the time of creation and will exist forever.  
Many have drunk from it and many will yet drink.  
As was the first meal, so shall be the last.  
May the master of comfort, comfort you.  
Blessed are those who comfort the mourners.

Psalm 34 “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”

There are people who **have** lost and there are people who **are** lost. This is our prayer for them and for ourselves.

We pray for guidance for those of us who are spiritually lost. Lost in the spiritual maze with dead ends and puzzling turns and confusing mirrors as we wonder if there is an end to the maze.

For now we see through a glass darkly. Now we see puzzling reflections in the mirrors within the maze. Now we know in part but then we shall know even as we also are known.

We offer this prayer to God to lift this burden of spiritual grief from our hearts. Shine your eternal light onto my soul and let me feel the joy of your love. Guide me with your wisdom, so I may understand your plan. Let me lean upon your strength so I may grow strong once more and emerge from this loss with a renewed spirit of love and hope.

Psalm 73 “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.”

The Queen died last Friday. In Australia, it is of no consequence whether we are royalists or republicans, we should respect the life of service that she offered to her country. May the new King Charles grow in wisdom with your spiritual guidance.

Lord we pray for help to meet these challenges.

Amen

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: TIS 417, Loving Spirit...

### Blessing

God to enfold you,  
God to surround you,  
God in your speaking,  
God in your thinking.

God in your sleeping,  
God in your waking,  
God in your watching,  
God in your hoping.

God in your life,  
God in your lips,  
God in your soul,  
God in your heart.

God in your sufficing,  
God in your slumber,  
God in your ever-living soul,  
God in your eternity.

# Thoughts for the week to come

## I'm growing old, Lord (Continued)

More 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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How can one believe, Lord, that time today  
is the same as time long ago,  
time that went so fast on certain days,  
certain months,  
so fast that I couldn't catch it  
and it got away from me  
before I was able to fill it with life?

Today I have time, Lord,  
too much time,  
time piling up beside me,  
unused,  
and I'm there, motionless,  
and no good for anything.

I'm growing old, Lord,  
and growing old is hard,  
so hard that some of my friends  
often ask for this life to be ended,  
a life which seems to them  
to be of no use from now on.

They're wrong, my child, says the Lord,  
and you're wrong too.  
Perhaps you don't say what they are saying,  
but sometimes you agree with them.  
All your brothers and sisters need you,  
and I need you today,  
as I needed you yesterday.  
Because a beating heart, though it may be worn out,  
still gives life to the body it inhabits,  
and the love in this heart can gush forth,  
often stronger and purer,  
when the tired body finally leaves space for it.  
Some very full lives,  
you see,  
can be empty of love,  
while others,



seemingly very ordinary,  
radiate love infinitely.

Look at my mother, Mary,  
weeping,  
motionless at the foot of my cross.  
She was there,  
standing upright, certainly,  
but she too was powerless,  
tragically *powerless*.

She did nothing,  
she was simply there,  
completely collected,  
completely welcoming,  
offering herself completely,  
and in this way, with me,  
she saved the world,  
giving back to it  
all the love that men and women had lost  
along the pathways of time.

Today, with her,  
standing by the crosses of the world,  
you must gather the enormous suffering of humanity,  
dead wood to be burned in the fire of love.  
But welcome the efforts and the joys also,  
because gathered flowers are lovely,  
but they are of no use  
unless they are given to somebody,  
and so many people think about living  
but forget to give.

Believe me,  
your life today  
can be richer than it was yesterday  
if you accept growing old,  
if you accept being a motionless sentinel watching  
for the evening;  
and if you suffer because you have nothing in your hands that you can give,  
*then offer your powerlessness*,  
and together, I tell you,  
we will continue saving the 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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Music: Peter Hurley

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