

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



23 OCTOBER 2022

PENTECOST 20



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 758 Lord have mercy...

Greeting

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all

And also with you

Call to Worship

This is the day the Lord has made:

a day for praise and prayer;

a day for gratitude and generosity.

This is the time God has given us:

a time for singing and silence;

a time for speaking and listening.

This is the life to which God calls us:

a life of humility and service;

a life of faith and trust.

Thom Schuman

Hymn: TIS 474 Here in this place

Prayer of Adoration/Confession/Forgiveness

ADORATION

Let us pray

God our father, you have made the light shine out of darkness; you have made the sun rise on the good and on the evil alike; you have given Jesus Christ to be the light of the world. Today you have awakened us and brought us here to praise your goodness and to ask for your blessing. We turn our thoughts towards you; we lift our minds to think of you; and though we cannot see you, yet we know that you are present in power and love to receive our praises and to give your help and strength, through JC Our Lord,

AMEN

CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON

We make our confession.

Let us pray.

Loving God, Redeemer and Friend, we confess that we are people of many moods and sins.

Sometimes we become so contented with our lot that we forget others; neglecting their rights, needs, hopes, disappointments, and joys.

Then again, sometimes we become so discontented with our lot that we make it hard for those around us; our sourness spreads through home, workplace, church and play.

We take many blessings without gratitude, exercise our gifts without thankfulness, use up our friends without appreciation, and go to church without any sense of privilege, wonder and joy.

And too often we travel through life so full of our own pride and self-sufficiency that we are incapable of genuine humility and graciousness

Merciful God, we are glad that you understand us, because too often we fail to understand ourselves.

We are relieved that you can save us, for we know we cannot save ourselves.

By the word of Christ Jesus, condemn that which is wrong within us, straighten that which is crooked, and encourage all within us that thirsts for righteousness.

Let your forgiveness flood over us and through us, leaving no dark corner unwashed. For your love's sake, we pray.

Amen!

In the name of Jesus Christ, who, for our sake and the sake of the world, humbly, lovingly followed God's way, leading him to the cross and beyond, I declare to you:

Our sins are forgiven

Thanks be to God

Hymn: TIS 681 Lord, let me see

Scripture

Your Word is a lamp to our feet
and a light to our path.

Joel 2:23–32

²³O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before. ²⁴The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. ²⁵I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you. ²⁶You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. ²⁷You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame. ²⁸Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. ³⁰I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ³²Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Psalm 65: (Read Responsively)

¹Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion;
and to you shall vows be performed,

²O you who answer prayer!

To you all flesh shall come.

³When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,
you forgive our transgressions.

⁴Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts.

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

⁵By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation;

you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.

⁶By your strength you established the mountains;

you are girded with might.

⁷You silence the roaring of the seas,

the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.

⁸Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;

you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for

joy.

⁹You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;

the river of God is full of water;

you provide the people with grain,

for so you have prepared it.

¹⁰You water its furrows abundantly,

settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its

growth.

¹¹You crown the year with your bounty;

your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

¹²The pastures of the wilderness overflow,

the hills gird themselves with joy,

¹³the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck

themselves with grain,

they shout and sing together for joy.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Gospel: Luke 18:9–14. (Note: Sing TiS 758 'Kyrie' between v 13 and v 14.)

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’* ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

*Sing TiS 758 'Kyrie' between v 13 and verse 14.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

Humility

“Greatness is not found in possessions, power, position, or prestige. It is discovered in goodness, humility, service, and character.”

William Arthur Ward

The Pharisee stood up by himself and prayed like this:

‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.’

The tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his chest saying: *“God, be merciful to me a sinner.”*

There is something very odd here.

If we judge people as we normally do in most societies, ie, by their lawfulness, goodness and niceness, then surely Jesus has got this the wrong way around. Actually, the Pharisee is the good guy and the Tax Collector is the rat bag!

You see, the Pharisee is truly a law abiding, good and very nice man. Let me quote Bruce Prewer:

‘I see this Pharisee as lean from living with moderation and fasting often. He is trying desperately hard to do the right thing. The only obligatory fast for a good Jew was once a year on the Day of Atonement. This chap is voluntarily doing it twice a week. What is more he does not merely give a tenth of his income to the temple, he gives a tenth of the cost of anything he buys; just in case the shop keeper does not tithe on his income.

This is not one of those religious guys who gets legalistic and meticulously pays attention to legal requirement but does not do a thing more. This man is really generous. We would love to have him as a member of this church, wouldn't we?’

Now let's hear what Prewer has to say about the Tax Collector:

‘In the parable the tax collector is not painted as a really nice guy. He is a rogue, a despicable person. Our common use of the word “tax collectors” (telones), as those whom Jesus welcomed, must not blunt the fact that they were traitors; “low lights” who collected taxes for an occupying army. These men were hated for good reason. They were the “bag men” for Rome. With the broad swords of the Roman military behind them, they enforced the payment of tolls, even from the poorest of the poor. And they made an extortionate profit from the business.

The tax man at the back of the Temple was a blood sucking creep. I see him as a very plump, well-dressed man, wearing lots of expensive jewellery.’

So, you have got to ask the question: Either Jesus has got it badly wrong!

OR....

You need to ask the difficult question as to where the ‘good’ Pharisee got it wrong?

To answer that question, consider this question.

What is the Pharisee actually doing?

Seek some answers

I don't think he is praying.

I think he is parading.

Parading his goodness before the Congregation.

By his actions, what is he actually declaring, demonstrating?

Flaunting his virtues, maybe...?

... his superiority?

BUT, NOT to gain the attention of God – Rather his self-praise is directed at the congregation, at the community.

He is more subtle than the language I am going to put in his mouth; but, isn't he just parading himself before the congregation, putting on a show.

“My fellow citizens, I am truly a real success, a ‘hot shot, a fantastic person!’ You must all feel pretty privileged to be in my company. A man of complete religious integrity”

Note: NO prayer here, no prayer about the pure beauty, goodness, love, grace and forgiveness of God, but just someone levering favour and status within the community.

But things get worse.

Not only is he pretty pumped up about himself, but he uses his ‘prayer’ time to PUT others DOWN!

Prayer!!!!???

REALLY!!!!???

This ‘good’ Pharisee seeks to impress God (or is that really his deep motive) not only by stating how wonderful he is, but by contrasting himself with ‘some other people’ (pew, I wonder who the ‘some others’ were, he had in mind!) So, he then elaborates on ‘some others’ – ‘not like others who are thieves, rogues and robbers and adulterers.’

Ohhhhh – I suspect a few heads in the congregation were dropping at that point, and quite a bit of mumbling!

We in the church, like the Pharisee so often get caught up in our own self-importance, self-justification – our agenda. And that quite often results in us not only being ‘closed’ to God but

being judgemental towards those who are too 'worldly!'

So, in the Presence of God, surely, we are not like squabbling siblings, jealous of each other and hoping to buy more parental love by being better than our sisters and brothers.

But, we don't earn 'brownie' points that way. Nor do we earn extra 'goodness' vouchers by bad-mouthing others who have 'sinned.'

Our only justification for being in the Presence of God comes down to this: God's unconditional love for us. We are here in God's temple because God wants us here. God loves us. Thank God for that!

St Augustine said, "It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels."

The tax collector was a despicable man, but he knew who he was, and he knew the hatred of those around him because of his treachery and deception. He hated himself and was full of self-loathing.

NEVERTHELESS, he looked for mercy, he knew deep down, nothing else could save him – nothing else could justify him.

He could ONLY be OK, whole, forgiven, healed, made new - through God; ONLY WHOLE if God freely granted wholeness, forgiveness, healing, newness of life to him despite his utter unworthiness. He was not in a position to earn this gift and he knew it.

But then, in reality, is it not true that NO ONE is in a position to earn the gift of God's Gracious New Life – it can ONLY ever be given - as a free gift from God. This is the nature of God's Grace. Grace is THE ULTIMATE Good News!

It is God's verdict alone that matters, and God's verdict is grace.

There is only ONE THING we are asked to do as Christians – ONE THING alone.

God asks us to leave room in our hearts, minds, bodies and souls for his Grace to enter in and transform us.

That's all! I repeat: that is all!

It is a tragedy when we fall into 'justifying ourselves' by our works; by our efforts, by 'our missions' and miss the one truly transformative force for true life.

Astonishing love, amazing grace for all, wrapped up in Jesus, and given for all.

On the other hand, all kinds of sinners who have given up all hope of self-vindication, find grace, mercy and peace, where such a gift seemed impossible for their lives.

They have a hunger, a gnawing emptiness in their souls, and through God's gracious love alone, see a way for that hunger to be met and their life transformed; truly an answer to prayer.

Here then is authentic gospel. Great news! Grace! The un-buyable, unpredictable, uncalculated, seemingly indiscriminate, generosity of God to even the most wayward of human beings – even you and me.

The writer Monica Baldwin states

“What makes humility so desirable is the marvelous thing it does to us; it creates in us a capacity for the closest possible intimacy with God”

Let us pray

Lord of love, generosity, grace and forgiveness, melt our hardened self-centred hearts so that in deep humility we might enter into your presence and receive the gift of your gracious love, not because we are worthy and not because we deserve it, and not because we are unworthy, but because you love us

We pray in the name of your gracious loving Son, Jesus Christ, who humbled himself, accepting death on a cross, so that we might have life in all its abundance:

Amen

Song: A Pharisee was praying – Tune: TiS 457 Aurelia

1. A Pharisee was praying; he proudly stood alone:
"God, thank you that I'm better than others I have known."
He saw the faults of others, yet in that holy place,
he missed the joy and wonder of God's amazing grace.
2. Far off in that same Temple, a tax collector stood.
He knew he was a sinner; but knew that God is good.
"Have mercy, God, upon me!" the tax collector cried.
He left that place of worship forgiven, justified.
3. God of love, forgive us when we look all around
and think that, by our actions, we stand on solid ground.
We pray, "See how we serve you! We work and volunteer!
aren't we the ones whose giving builds up your kingdom here?"
4. May we, your church, be humble in serving you each day,
for pride will never help us to walk your kingdom-way.
May we know your forgiveness — our need for mercy, too —
that, loved and loving others, our life may be in you.

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Prayers – Prepared by Ron Townsend

Happy are the people whose strength is in the Lord! Let us come humbly before the most high, praying,

God be merciful,
and hear our prayer

Let us pray

Lord, be merciful to your Church. Forgive us our pride and the times we obscure your mercy because of it. Give us humility that we may generously give to you as you have given to us

Silence

God be merciful,
and hear our prayer

Lord be merciful to our nation. Forgive us our pride and the times we have gloried in our own accomplishments, neglecting those in need around us. Today we think particularly of all those in Vic, NSW and Tassie who are struggling with the threat of floods. Give us humility that we may generously care for the orphans, the widows, and all those in need.

Silence

God be merciful,
and hear our prayer

Lord, be merciful to those us of who are called to care for your creation. Forgive us our pride and the times we have polluted the springs, pools, rivers and seas with which you have blessed us. Lord, we think particularly of all those who are suffering because of the damage that climate change is now causing. Give us humility, that we may deal justly and generously deal with all of your creation.

Silence

God be merciful,
and hear our prayer

Lord, be merciful to the residents of our local community. Forgive our pride for the times we failed to trust in your on-going love for ALL your children. Give us the strength we need to show your care everywhere, with all we meet and in all we do. Give us humility that we may generously address the challenges that face us as we relate to our neighbours nearby and our neighbours far away.

Silence

God be merciful,
and hear our prayer

Lord, be merciful to all those with broken hearts, broken bodies, broken minds and broken souls. Forgive us our pride for the times we have exalted ourselves above your suffering servants. Give us humility that we may generously love and care for all your people

Invite the congregation to add their petitions and thanksgivings

Silence

God be merciful,
and hear our prayer

Lord, be merciful to all who have died. Forgive us our pride for the times we forget that we are surrounded and upheld by the everlasting communion of saints who have gone before us. Graciously accept all who have died and grant them a dwelling place with you.

Silence

God be merciful,
and hear our prayer

We pray together as Jesus taught us
THE LORDS PRAYER

Dismissal

Go from this place and whenever you sink into self-hate and loathing; depressed with our own failure and the failure of those around you, loosen your heart and voice, to cry out to our God, for his unending gracious, loving mercy.

Go from this place and whenever you are tempted to think of yourself as better than others, more worthy, more deserving, more important to God - may your humility, God, break in and challenge us,
reminding us of our brokenness and need,
and teaching us to serve and to love everyone
with the grace and humility, you show toward us.

A prayer from Sacredise, adapted by Ron Townsend

Benediction

God the Father make you whole in his love;
God the Son enrich you with his grace;
God the Holy Spirit strengthen you with joy;
the Lord bless you and keep you in eternal life.

Word of Mission

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