

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



SUNDAY January 25th, 2025

UCA Day of Mourning

A Change of Heart



GREETING

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
And the love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all
And also with you

WELCOME

Good morning one and all.

This morning Jesus proclaims “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”.

More than just regret or remorse, repentance is “a change of mind, a reorientation, a fundamental transformation of outlook, of a person's vision of the world and of themselves, and a new way of loving others and God.”

It is, in the truest sense, a change of heart.

This is particularly appropriate for today which the Uniting Church has designated a day of mourning. This is where, at the invitation of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, the Church pauses to remember the ongoing impact of colonization on First Peoples and what part our nation and community continue to play in that.

But repentance is not just acknowledging what we have or have not done. It's turning toward God's desired future for us all.

We do this in, and as, the church, seeking the unity that reflects God's will to reconcile all of creation to God.

In a couple of weeks' time at our dedication service, we will get to meet Charissa Suli who is the President of the Uniting Church in Australia. She writes this about the day of mourning:

‘We recognise that congregations come to this day carrying different histories, emotions, and understandings. Some approach it with deep sorrow; some with uncertainty; others with a longing to do better. Wherever we are on that journey, we are held by the same God whose love calls us into deeper relationship.’

So today we gather not to resolve history, but to come before God with honesty, openness and love.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Join me in this call to worship as we read Psalm 40 responsively

As a call to worship let us read psalm 27 responsively.

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

**The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?**

One thing I asked of the Lord;
this I seek:
**to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.**

For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
**he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.**

Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
**and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.**

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!
**“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”
Your face, Lord, do I seek.
Do not hide your face from me.**

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
**Do not cast me off; do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!**

Let us pray:

Lord you are alive amongst all things of creation.
The sounds of the rivers in motion and the waves of the seas.
The scents of the gum trees and native flowers on the winds.

You made the earth to give us life and daily sustenance.

It is on the land that we find a place to retreat and walk alongside you in whispering conversation.

Today we come together, and we bring our full voices, to lift them in praise of our triune God.

We ask for forgiveness for not always being the givers of love and hospitality.
And, we look to you to fill our hearts with compassion for others.

Lord our father of unconditional love,
we come in repentance and hope

Jesus, son of guiding and teaching love,
we come to listen, learn and act with courage.

Holy Spirit of multiplying love, we come with humble awe and wonder of what you might move within our hearts and the hearts of those with whom we share life

Amen

HYMN 631 Father lord of all creation

1 Father, Lord of all creation,
ground of being, life and love;
Height and depth beyond description,
only life in you can prove:
You are mortal life's dependence:
thought, speech, sight are ours by grace;
Yours is every hour's existence,
sovereign Lord of time and space.

2 Jesus Christ, the man for others
we, your people, make our prayer
help us love, as sisters, brothers
all whose burdens we can share
where your name binds us together
you, Lord Christ, will surely be
where no selfishness can sever
there you love the world may see.

3 Holy Spirit, rushing, bringing
wind and flame of Pentecost
fire our hearts afresh with yearning
to regain what we have lost
may your love unite our action
nevermore to speak alone
God, in us, abolish faction
God, through us, your love make known.

PRAYER OF ADORATION THANKSGIVING

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
and bring to you a joyful sacrifice,
an offering of prayer in your temple.

At the dawn of creation
you were the light that split open the darkness
and brought all things into being.
You called a people to live in your presence
and walk in the light of your law and prophets.

In Jesus the Christ you have proclaimed to us
the good news of the nearness of heaven
and called us to repent
and to follow him as disciples.

He was killed but you raised him to new life,

and although his cross is derided as foolishness,
to us who are being saved it is your power at work,
breaking the grip of our oppressors,
teaching us your truth,
healing our sicknesses,
increasing our joy
and leading us home to your house of prayer.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Oh God, your love is wider than our differences,
larger than our loneliness,
and stronger than our sorrows.

At times we may doubt that we are able to overcome hostilities we feel towards others, or have felt towards us,

Yet you invite us to experience
that through surrender and obedience to your great and reconciling love,
we are able to see more clearly the beautiful picture
of your gift of a wondrous creation.

Oh God, we know the work of reconciliation is not simple.

It requires peoples who may feel suffering through dispute, to look at each other as we would look to reconciling with you God;
to see the joy in working to live amongst each other in peace - in a creation made for us.

Help us to understand that reconciliation between First and Second Peoples, and within our communities and within our families and within ourselves must begin with reconciling ourselves in truth and humility with you, our God.

Then we can do the work of being peacemakers and justice seekers, in understanding what we may need to know better, to be able to act responsibly and respectfully.

Oh God our hope for our Church,
is that we look towards each other as peoples of God,
who wish to be supported to live freely,
and enjoy the giving of spiritual care for each other,
through wonder and worship.

In a moment of silence we bring to you those things in our lives that we need help to let go of so that we can love you and love one another.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Who bore our sins,
And is the great reconciler.

Amen!

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

"God is love. ... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (1 John 4:16, 18)

Friends, this is Christ's word of grace to every single one of us— listen: "Your sins are forgiven."

Thanks be to God.

PASSING OF THE PEACE

Christ is our peace. He has reconciled us to God in one body by dying on the cross and rising to new life.

We meet in his name and share his peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Please share the peace with one another

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Your Word, Oh Lord, is a lamp to our feet;
A light to our path

Matthew 4:12-23

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13 He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles—
16 the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned."

17 From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. 19

And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

23 Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose. 11 For it has been made clear to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12 What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” 13 Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel—and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For these words of witness and Christ the Word
Thanks be to God

HYMN 621 O God of every nation

1 O God of every nation,
of every race and land,
redeem your whole creation
with your almighty hand;
where hate and fear divide us,
and bitter threats are hurled,
in love and mercy guide us
and heal our strife-torn world.

2 From search for wealth and power
and scorn of truth and right,
from trust in bombs that shower
destruction through the night,
from pride of race and nation
and blindness to your way,
deliver every nation,
eternal God, we pray.

3 Lord, strengthen all who labour
that all may find release

from fear of rattling saber,
from dread of war's increase;
when hope and courage falter,
Lord, let your voice be heard;
with faith that none can alter
your servants undergird.

4 Keep bright in us the vision
of days when war shall cease,
when hatred and division
give way to love and peace,
till dawns the morning glorious
when truth and justice reign,
and Christ shall rule victorious
o'er all the world's domain.

SERMON

May the meditations of our hearts and our minds be always acceptable in your sight,
God our strength and our redeemer.

Amen

In today's gospel reading Jesus is on the move – spreading good news and healing the sick. The kingdom of heaven is near, and everyone is invited.

In the last couple of weeks, we've heard stories of John baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan and then John introducing two of his disciples to Jesus, calling him the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John is effectively handing over his disciples to Jesus. Now this week when we hear of John's arrest and Jesus' move to Galilee, the full stop is put on John's ministry and Jesus' ministry begins.

Jesus' departure from Nazareth after John's arrest may be partly strategic. Jesus is a prophet, and King Herod is no fan of prophets, as John's arrest and later execution show us. Yes, Jesus will eventually submit himself to arrest and execution but there's more to do until then.

But there's another reason he goes where he does.

Matthew proclaims that in going to Galilee to begin his ministry Jesus is fulfilling God's prophecy from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah tells us that In the Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles, the people who sat in darkness will see a great light.

When Isaiah wrote that in the 8th century BCE, the darkness he refers to is the despair of the people of Galilee during their violent occupation by the Assyrian empire. In Jesus' time it's the same despair at the occupation of the Roman empire.

So, when Jesus goes to Galilee, he fulfils Isaiah's prophecy and shows that the divine is at work in his ministry. He is God's light to the nations.

And this transition from John to Jesus is not just a transition between places. It's a transition between peoples. John ministered in Judea, largely to Jews. But by going

to Galilee Jesus is travelling to the margins and will draw the attention of Jew and gentile alike. Jesus seeks to widen his circle of followers.

This historical context of how the Israelites experienced the Assyrian empire and then the Roman empire is important on this day of mourning. It was the British empire that many First Nations people experienced as darkness. And it's a darkness that hangs over the lives of many First nations people to this day.

How then might Jesus be a light to First Nations people? How can we, as disciples of Christ, be a witness to that?

Well, the headline teaching from Jesus, echoing John, is this:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Repent.

How does that word sound to you? Repent.

To most people, I think, it sounds something like admitting you did something wrong and showing regret or remorse.

But Jesus wants more for us than this. If we stay in regret and remorse we're stuck in our own feelings. That kind of makes it all about us. But Jesus wants our vision looking outward. He wants us to love God and Neighbour as we love ourselves. Jesus wants a lot more for his creation than regret or remorse.

The word that gets translated into English as repentance is the Greek word 'Metanoia'. If we break it down into parts, Meta means, among other things, change and noia means mind.

That's why the Greek Orthodox church in America says that metanoia means “a change of mind, a reorientation, a fundamental transformation of outlook, of a person's vision of the world and of themselves, and a new way of loving others and God.” That's a lot different than just showing remorse and moving on with life like its business as usual. It's the change in the heart of a person.

Don't get me wrong, admitting to ourselves, to God and sometimes to others that we've erred is very important. But notice here Jesus is not saying “repent or perish”. He's saying “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” We reckon with our past so that we might step into the new creation that is dawning.

So, repentance is more than what we turn away from. It's what we turn to. Jesus' life gives us a glimpse into what the Kingdom of Heaven will look like. Jesus' way is an invitation to us into the Kingdom and repentance is our response to that invitation.

To live as a community that seeks to reconcile all people, we must always make that move of truth-telling and recognition while turning toward hope and justice.

But nor is repentance, as Jesus understood it, just a morality project. It's more than "I'll try to stop doing bad things and start doing more good things." It's about understanding oneself as always in the presence of God.

There are many ways people can feel the presence of God. It might be through art or nature or philosophy. It's important to cultivate this presence and see if it can hold us through the transformation God wants for us.

But when we truly follow Jesus, we are drawn to the healing and liberation of others. This is where we find the presence of God. It's not to, in inverted commas, "be a good person". It's to notice, love, and thereby affirm, the image of God in another. God's kingdom is found in us building up the bearer of that image. Especially the bearers of that image that the world chooses to leave behind.

And this includes the theme of connection I spoke about last week. When there is a mutual recognition of God in the other, we are glimpsing the Kingdom of Heaven and find ourselves in the presence of the living God.

This is one reason why we gather as a church - so that we might sense the presence of God and enact his will between and beyond us.

But sometimes being a church - a people of God - isn't easy.

To be a disciple of Jesus means we don't get to decide who else walks alongside us as disciples of Jesus. We aren't always going to feel comfortable with the people we walk alongside. They may have different opinions than us. They might be just as annoying as we are. They may remind us of a history we would rather forget. Any collection of humans who mean something to one another will be vulnerable to tension and even conflict.

These conflicts and tensions are why Paul writes to the church in Corinth in the other reading we heard today.

Paul was not naïve about the reality of conflict in the church. He even wrote about how one of his own visits to the Corinthians caused them grief. But this did not stop him from imploring the churches not to let tension become divisions or factions.

Paul writes:

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose.

Asking them all to agree does not necessarily mean they must all think the same. It's to say they should be agreeable in the sense of adopting a posture of goodwill towards each other.

Yes, ignoring the questions, issues and history that give rise to tension creates false unity and makes real unity more difficult.

But voicing disagreement or concern without ultimately wanting loving reconciliation is not the way of God either.

But we don't want unity just because it will make our own lives easier and make mission more effective. We seek it because God's will, through Christ, is the unity of all creation. That's why Paul writes to the Corinthians that "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." So, if we preach and desire the unity of the human family, then we need to seek to embody this as a church.

But the human family is diverse. The irony is that the way to embody unity in the church is to acknowledge and appreciate difference. Not to try and make it go away.

This is all to say that repentance is a transformation from living life in the prison of constant self-regard (whether it be pride or shame) to participating in the Kingdom of Heaven where one seeks God and the other (and God in the other). In doing so we might experience the mutual indwelling of God. The church is a place where we seek to experience and understand this and live our lives accordingly.

When I said earlier that this transformation is not easy, this is not only because we are imperfect. It's also because, as Paul says, it's the way of the cross.

On the cross Christ identifies with those who are excluded and expendable – the outcasts that the world deems worthless enough to let die or even kill. By identifying with all the outcasts of the world he takes on the scorn the world pours on them and thus is in solidarity with them. Christ is with the downtrodden and the dispossessed, calling all of us to repent and join him. This is the ultimate in unity.

Yet Paul is right when he calls the cross foolishness to the world. To sacrifice all that we think makes us a success in the eyes of the world so as to include the excluded can seem risky or pointless.

Paul writes in Galatians that "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." That in essence is the way of the cross. That in essence is repentance. To the world this sounds like self-destruction but in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is breaking into the world, this is abundant life for us and for the excluded.

In a way repentance is the beginning of the church – a church that seeks to reflect the new creation, telling the truth about the world and healing divisions.

What Jesus does through his death and resurrection is to transform the cross into the new tree of life. Through the cross Jesus reconciles all creation to God and one another and calls us to embody that reconciliation in the world.

Amen

APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand
of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

HYMN 648 Help us accept each other

1 Help us accept each other
as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother,
each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us
and bring us to believe
we are ourselves accepted,
and meant to love and live.

2 Teach us, O Lord, your lessons,
as in our daily life
we struggle to be human
and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people,
for all, not just for some,
to love them as we find them
or as they may become.

3 Let your acceptance change us,
so that we may be moved
in living situations
to do the truth in love;
to practice your acceptance
until we know by heart
the table of forgiveness,
and laughter's healing art.

4 Lord, for today's encounters
with all who are in need,

who hunger for acceptance,
for righteousness and bread,
we need new eyes for seeing,
new hands for holding on:
renew us with your Spirit;
Lord, free us, make us one!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Leader: Loving God, on this day of celebration we acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout Australia. We turn to you in prayer as we commit ourselves to journeying together in the spirit of Faith. Father, you are good.

All: Lord fill our hearts with Love and Compassion

Leader: We pray for all Leaders in this Great Southern Land, that they may respect and accept the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provide truth, justice, peace, unity and equity for all. Father you are good.

All: Lord fill our hearts with Love and Compassion

Leader: We ask for your guidance for the youth on their life's journey, that they come to seek and know you and trust in your love and compassion. Father you are good.

All: Lord fill our hearts with Love and Compassion

Leader: We pray for all Elders, those who are sick, the dying, the imprisoned, those who are lost and suffering – we ask for your protection, healing and mercy for all. Father you are good.

All: Lord fill our hearts with Love and Compassion

Leader: Lord thank you for your Mercy which covers all our Sins and for the love which you wash over us. Please help us to be strong in Faith and to love everyone as you taught us. Father you are good.

All: Lord fill our hearts with Love and Compassion

Leader: Let us all take a moment's silence as we pray for our personal intentions to our God.

....

Father you are good.

All: Lord fill our hearts with Love and Compassion

Leader: God, our loving Father, you reveal your care and compassion to us through the life, words and deeds of your son Jesus. Grant us the gift of your compassion so that all peoples may enjoy your promise of peace. With humble hearts we make our prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen

THE LORDS 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

OFFERING

Gracious God, through the resurrection of our
Lord Jesus, you have given immeasurable grace
to us. May our offerings reflect the grace we have
received, and symbolise lives committed to the
service of our risen Lord.

Amen.

HYMN 275 Hail to the Lord's Anointed

1 Hail to the Lord's anointed,
great David's greater Son;
hail, in the time appointed,
his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
to set the captive free,
and take away transgression,
and rule in equity.

2 He comes with help and mercy
to those who suffer wrong,
to raise the poor and needy,
and bid the weak be strong,
to give them songs for sighing,
their darkness turn to light,
whose souls condemned and dying
were precious in his sight.

3 He shall come down like showers
upon the fruitful earth,
and love, joy, hope, like flowers,
spring in his path to birth;
before him on the mountains
shall peace the herald go,

and righteousness in fountains
from hill to valley flow.

4 Kings shall fall down before him,
and gold and incense bring;
all nations shall adore him,
his praise all people sing;
to him shall prayer unceasing
and daily vows ascend;
his kingdom still increasing,
a kingdom without end.

5 O'er every foe victorious,
he on his throne shall rest,
from age to age more glorious,
all blessing and all-blest.
The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove;
his name shall stand for ever,
that name to us is love.

WORD OF MISSION

Go out in response to the voice of God who calls you.
Go out to proclaim the message of repentance and reconciliation,
for the Kingdom of heaven is near.

Go out united in purpose
and do not be afraid when your purpose is called foolishness.

SENDING OUT

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen

DISMISSAL

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

Amen.

POSTLUDE

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.
Music and Words reproduced with permission under CCLI licenses

Presider: Brad Denniston
Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office
Tuesdays, 9.30am-1.30pm
Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm
Phone: 0411 958 127
office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

Website: www.ormondunitingchurch.org

NEWS & NOTICES