

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



23 APRIL 2023

EASTER 3



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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

WELCOME

INTROIT TIS 703 As the deer pants for the water

CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus Christ, on the journey with us through all life's ups and downs

Jesus Christ, on the journey with us enlightening the scriptures

Jesus Christ, on the journey with us and known and present in the breaking
of the bread.

**Jesus Christ, the resurrected one, may our hearts burn within us as we
come together in worship today.**

HYMN TIS 387 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing

PRAYER OF PRAISE & CONFESSION

Praise be to you God of the ages. From the beginning of time your creative presence has sustained the universe. Your creative imagination has conjured up worlds un-thought of. You established order out of chaos, bringing to life a world of beauty and goodness. The mystery of your creative power amazes us and yet O God you desire to relate to us through love. You are LOVE and in Jesus Christ you have revealed to us what your love is like. Through his extraordinary life and through the manner of his suffering, death and resurrection we come face to face with the profundity of your love. And in this Easter time we experience the mystery and wonder of the Resurrection. Such considerations as these amaze us O God and so we would approach you today in deep humility. Reveal to us your presence that we may experience anew your grace and love in Jesus and the joy of life in your Spirit.

O God we have a radical vision of life and relationship as seen in Jesus Christ but confess that it is something we rarely achieve ourselves. It is not easy to be people of love. It is costly. We see what it cost Jesus to love and we are daunted by the challenge of that, so aware that at times when we lack kindness, generosity and grace, so aware of when we judge others in ways in which we would not want to be judged.

Forgive our short-sightedness and expand our vision.

We hear your call for a changed world and wonder if it is possible. We lose heart so easily and feel powerless to do anything. The groaning earth sometimes seems so complex and endless in its struggles that we often would rather not look beyond our own small corner of life.

Forgive us, O God, and give us the gift of faith. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God is the beginning and the end and is making all things new, even us, who come in need of grace. Let us receive God's grace and know that we are forgiven. And to this we say: **Thanks be to God.**

SHARING THE PEACE

SERVICE OF THE WORD (Kristina Parish)

Acts 2: 14a, 22-32

14But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. 27For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption. 28Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.' 29 "Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

Luke 24; 13-35

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

19 "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They

came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

HYMN TIS 245 We have a gospel to proclaim

SERMON “Christ in the guise of a stranger”

The journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus in our Gospel story from Luke today was only 12 k and probably a pretty comfortable walk for those used to walking everywhere though if you read the text closely it says that they returned the same night meaning they covered about 25 in the day. Well what are we to make of what is such a familiar story on this third Sunday of Easter. It's a marvellous Easter story isn't... perhaps my favourite. It is one we can all relate to but first of all we have to try and comprehend the Resurrection, that which is incomprehensible, the most earth shattering, mind boggling disbelieving mystery, event, happening, experience... call it what you like ... but which is the foundation of Christianity. It is a mystery that is shattering to our psyche and to all our ways of rationally logical thinking. And yet we would not be here today if our faith did not have this foundation, a foundation which undergirds our actions and way of being. That's our context, that's what we have been brought face to face with these past two weeks since Easter Sunday but which subliminally is with us every day as Christians. How have we handled it this Easter? Well this Emmaus road story is a little gentler on the psyche I think. Not like for the disciples in the passage just before this story in Luke today who thought the story of the empty tomb but “an idle tale” they could not believe. I don't know if you have come across anything written by Rev Dr Garry Deverell before. He is an Indigenous man from northern Tasmania and has a pretty impressive CV as a minister having ministered in the Baptist, Anglican and Uniting Churches as well as being the author of the notable publication “Gondwana Theology”. I have been taking the occasional service at Oakleigh, the Balkara Parish, and learnt the other day that he had also worked there some time ago. Anyway I'm not here to outline his CV in full although it seems I've made a pretty good start, but to quote from a sermon he wrote on the Emmaus story. He quotes Jurgen Moltmann the great German theologian of the 20th Century, and I'll come back to Moltmann again later. But this is what Moltmann says about the Resurrection. “The Resurrection is an event without analogy. No matter how much we try to understand and describe him (Jesus), the risen Christ will always and everywhere elude our grasp. We see him as a glass darkly, he is a flash of light at the corner of our eyes, which, if we turn to take squarely into the full ambit of our gaze, will disappear into invisibility. The Celtic

Christian tradition speaks of the Christ who always comes in the guise of the stranger, a stranger who is gone even before one realises who he was. In precisely that mode, the Emmaus story tells us that no matter how ingenious our resurrection accounts and theologies become, they will certainly not secure a Christ who may be domesticated for our own use and purpose". Repeat if need to. The Resurrection is so confounding it turns everything upside down and that's the context of this Road to Emmaus story. And here we are with two of Jesus confused and grief stricken followers trying to grasp the confounding news of an empty tomb when their leader, their hero, the one "who would redeem Israel" had been crucified on a cross. The women "astounded us" (the passage says) with the news after they had been to the tomb and found it empty. They are not first-hand witnesses and you might say that they are being broken in slowly while they talked with each other and discussed all that had happened. Then suddenly they are joined by a stranger they don't recognise as Jesus who asks them what they were discussing. "They stood still, looking sad". I only noticed that this week... "they stood still" before Cleopas says "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days"? You can almost see him with hands on hips and indignation in his voice. This aside though it is then that Jesus goes on to tell them about what the prophets had declared about the Messiah having to suffer interpreting "to them all the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Verse 27). Still they don't recognise him and it is only after he agrees to stay with them and share a meal and he blesses and breaks the bread the recognition comes. Gradual revelation... step by step. It was the breaking of the bread that the final revelation came but as the passage goes on to say "were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us". Something was going on their transformation to recognition even then. Gradual revelation! Is not how this can be for us too? It would be easy to say, and it is the obvious thing to stress from this passage, that Jesus walks with us... is with us... every step of the way though we might not realise it. It is only in hindsight that we recognise this. I was a convert to Christianity but it wasn't overnight but a gradual process over a period of four or five months culminating in a captivating reading of the New Testament which suddenly came alive. It was only after that that I walked into a church. There will always be something that speaks to us in any worship service we attend no matter how boring that service might seem. A word in a prayer, or from the reading, verse of a hymn, an organ postlude, a word with our pew neighbour. There is always something that will penetrate and reveal Christ a little more to us and of course it doesn't have to be from a worship service. It can be our own prayer and devotional time, communing with nature through time in the bush. Just being quiet... finding silence so that the spirit might speak. I mentioned Yurgen Moltmann before and I would like to finish with his story as an illustration in a way of the Emmaus story. Moltmann had been a late draftee to Hitler's army in 1945 and been captured and taken to a POW camp in Scotland. He was a broken man beset with nightmares about the war and worse was to come when in September of 1945 the POW's were confronted with images of Belsen and Auschwitz. Slowly the truth filtered into the POW's awareness and in Moltmann's case an unshakeable shame saturated his being and the only future he could see stretching out before him was one of despair and hopelessness. A visiting chaplain gave him a Bible and with little else to do, he began reading it. In the lament of the Psalms he heard resonant voices, the agony of a people who felt God had abandoned them. In the story of Christ crucified he encountered a God who knew what it was to experience suffering, abandonment and shame. In 1947 he was given permission to attend a Christian conference that brought together young people from across the world. The Dutch participants asked to meet the German POW's who had fought in the Netherlands. Moltmann was one of them. He went to the meeting full of fear and shame which only intensified as the Dutch Christians spoke of the pain Hitler had inflicted, the dread of the Gestapo, of family and friends they had lost. Yet these Dutch Christians didn't speak out of vindictiveness and bitterness, but came to offer forgiveness. They embodied the love that this German soldier had read about in the story of Christ and it turned his life upside down. "The Crucified God" is one of Moltmann's most famous books. It was the crucified and resurrected Christ that changed Moltmann and it is the crucified and resurrected Christ no matter how dramatic or gradual that revelation of him is that changes and sustains us in our faith journeys. Amen

HYMN TIS 353 The glory of our King was seen

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE & LORDS PRAYER

(Heather Baxter)

Reconciling God, we pray for the peace of the world.
For the end of all suspicion or rivalry among the many parts of your Church.
Come with your peace, Lord Jesus;
Come and heal your people.

For the exposure of all injustices
And a new courage from all nations to outlaw them.
Come with your peace, Lord Jesus;
Come and heal your people.

For a fairer sharing of the earth's resources
And the feeding of the hungry.
Come with your peace, Lord Jesus;
Come and heal your people.

For the resettlement of refugees
And the uplifting of the downtrodden.
Come with your peace, Lord Jesus;
Come and heal your people.

For an end of terrorism and war,
And for international commitment to a just peace.
Come with your peace, Lord Jesus;
Come and heal your people.

For the maimed and abused, diseased and the dying,
The frightened and sorrowful.
Come with your peace, Lord Jesus;
Come and heal your people.

Reconciling God,
Help us to allow the peace of Christ,
Which this world's sophistication knows nothing of
To keep us sure-footed, even handed and open armed,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen

Mission Prayer Handbook 2006 "God's Word God's People" UCA National Assembly

HYMN TIS 242 I danced in the morning when the world was begun

BENEDICTION

WORD OF MISSION

ORGAN POSTLUDE

Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

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NEWS & NOTICES