

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



7 MAY 2023

EASTER 5 YEAR A



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.

Greeting

The grace of our 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

Come, people of God!
Take refuge in the Lord,
who listens when we cry out,

**who rescues us when we call,
and who leads and guides us according to his unfailing love.**

You are our God;
our lives are in your hands.

Let's worship God together! Amen.

Written by Christine Longhurst, posted at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/05/call-to-worship-for-easter-5.html>.

HYMN TIS 595: O Jesus I have Promised

Prayers Of Adoration and Confession

PRAYER OF ADORATION

We praise you, O God:

In your humility, you seek us.
In your mercy, you keep us.
In your humiliation, you glorify us.
In your generosity, you provide for us.
In your wisdom, you place us.
In your might, you shield us.
In your governance, you make us holy.

In your communion, you teach us.
In your love, you lift us up.
Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

In the act of confession, we acknowledge how we have missed the mark, and we call upon God to save us from the destruction of sin and turn us back toward life. Let us now confess our sin before God and one another.

We confess that we have not loved you as you command us to love.
We have not relied on you as our refuge, choosing instead to seek comfort in busyness and distractions.
We have not trusted that only when we put ourselves in your hands can we find peace the peace we crave.

Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

We confess that we have not loved our neighbours as you command us to love.
We buy into the myth that it's every person for themselves.
We ignore the pain of those around us.
We refuse your call to care for the poor and the marginalized.

Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

We confess that we do not answer your call to steward creation.
We look upon the earth as something to consume instead of tend.
We point fingers at others instead of doing what is ours to do.
We choose comfort over responsibility.

Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Offer silent prayers of confession.

Hear these words:
When we call, God inclines an ear to us
and comes quickly to help us.
God's love is steadfast to rescue us and redeem us.
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

**In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!
Glory to God! Amen.**

*Adapted from Psalm 31 NRSVUE by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries,
October 2022.*

The Service Of The Word

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

A light to our path

ACTS 7:55-60

⁵⁵But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶“Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” ⁵⁷But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.

PSALM 31:1-5, 15-16 – *To be read responsively as recorded in U in W Blue book – page 268-270*

¹In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.

²Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

³You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me,

⁴take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

JOHN 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

Reflection

As John Lamont suggested when he was with us a couple of weeks ago – we are still in the season of Easter (3 weeks to go) and that EVERY Sunday is an Easter celebration.

We are Easter people! In faith, EVERY DAY we celebrate the Easter event as the centre and heart of authentic human living!

And what a great joy that is! Love, Peace Justice, Community, servanthood, take centre stage in our Human existence, ours and the world's – even if the world does not recognise that! Our meaning, purpose, fulfilment and transformation in life are the gifts of the Spirit in our Easter re-birth as children of the God of unfailing love.

Over the last couple of weeks we have seen the deaths of three of our faithful members. Wilma Tucker, Marj Ponsford, and Pat Janson. Of course, that has created a time of sadness for their families and friends, and also for our church family. Over their combined lifetimes of nearly 285 years, they have truly reflected the words of St Paul in his letter to Peter.

'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.'

Each of Wilma, Marj and Pat reflected this kind of faithfulness and so, while we may be saddened by their loss, we can give huge thanks to God for their living out of the faith. I am sure if they were here, indeed perhaps they are, each of them would say, 'To God be the glory!'

So, they lived the Easter life, alongside their human frailty, of course, but never lost their love of Jesus

So, I have an Easter question for you?

A sort of probing Easter question!

What are the things which made Wilma, and Marj and Pat feel safe, secure and 'at ease(at peace):'

Turn to a neighbour and have a chat about Wilma, Marj and Pat – particularly, in regard to safety, security and at ease-ness(or peace). And in a couple of minutes, I'll ask a few of you if you would be willing to share your thoughts.

Invite answers.

And the associated question, I guess, is where do you find your safety, security and peace?'

Invite answers

Thanks for those thoughts.

The readings from Psalm and Acts, this morning, deal with the issue of where we get true, fair dinkum security, safety and peace.

They are written about characters who are firm believers and resolute in their faithfulness BUT face great insecurity, danger and tension (the opposites of security safety and peace), despite their utter faithfulness!

The most graphic is the story of the stoning of Stephen from Acts. The context of Stephen's stoning is the conclusion of a sermon he preached in which he details again

and again what God has done for Israel. But then contrasts the faithfulness of God in that history with the inflexibility and narrow-mindedness of the people of Israel.

The breaking point between his listen and him, comes when Stephen

'accuses his hearers of being of the same obstinate and rebellious stock as Moses' generation (vs. 51–53). Just as they denied the prophet Moses, so they have denied the latter and greater prophet, Jesus.'

As a result, like a lynch mob, they seize Stephen and murder him; stoning him to death!

Not a lot of security, safety and peace here, for the faithful one, you would reckon!

Then, in the psalm the writer laments his precarious position. We don't know what that danger or threat is, but whatever it is the Psalmist paints a picture of danger attacking him from all sides.

'Do not let me ever be put to shame; ⁴take me out of the net that is hidden for me, deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors; save me.'

My point is that for all of us, Easter juxta-positions TWO states of being: on the one hand, the unsurpassable joy of knowing the Risen Christ and on the other hand, the resistance the disciple meets in the world at large and at home, to that unsurpassable joy!

So, in the case of Stephen, as he preaches the good news of God's reconciling love and shares a vision of the full glory of God, with Jesus the Son standing alongside the Father, those listening are so infuriated that they seize him and stone him to death.

But, and this is a big BUT,

'the text makes it quite clear that those who are really dead are not Stephen, but the disciple's killers. His pain may be the most immediate [and terrible], but his joy is ultimate and final, while their twisted and hate-poisoned hearts show no inclination to be open to any good news of what God has done and is doing.' TFP

For Stephen his safety, security and peace are to be found in absolute faithfulness, even if it costs his very life.

So, he prays, he actually prays, as he is killed,

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

WOW!

One commentator says of his death:

'the sureness of God's promises (detailed in Stephen's sermon) and of the certainty of the victory of God over all those ancient wrongs that distort human life and rob it of its joy—it is this sense and only this sense that can effect a joy so serene that it prays for the wellbeing of those who wish to do it to death.'

And what about in the Psalm. Listen again to the Psalmist's cries of faithfulness in the face of the threats and dangers he encounters.

'In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; in your righteousness deliver me.'

²Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.³You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, ⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God. ¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me. ¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.'

The psalmist faces perils of an unknown nature but can declare in the midst of it all:
'you have redeemed me, in your steadfast love, O LORD, faithful God.'

There is a divine Easter mystery here that every disciple is called to live with: How do we live in the all-surpassing joy of God's love, grace and forgiveness in Christ, while at the same time coping with repeated crises in life, particularly those that challenge our faith?

This is a bit weird, but I find help by writing: writing down the key beliefs I hold – so I have written an affirmation of Faith (see below - not exactly a Nicene Creed) because it helps me to see what is really of utmost importance in life and helps me to look at the crises in my life and in my faith through the lens of God's redeeming love for me and the world. That energises my faith. What about you?

Let me finish with this quote from Neal Maxwell

How can you and I really expect to glide naively through life, as if to say, 'Lord, give me experience, but not grief, not sorrow, not pain, not opposition, not betrayal, and certainly not to be forsaken. Keep from me, Lord, all those experiences which made Thee what Thou art! Then, let me come and dwell with Thee and fully share Thy joy!'

Let us pray.

Lord, we thank you for lives of faith, like Wilma's, Marj's and Pat's. Thank you for the likes of Stephen and the Psalmist who held on to you and your love, no matter what. Inspire us to faithfulness, inspire us by your love in us, as we share it with others in our daily journeys.

We pray in our Saviour's name,
Amen

HYMN TIS 240: All Go to God

Affirmation of Earth

In the beginning God was.

God was love! Pure love!

With that love, God the Father created all life, and it was good.

But humans broke the bond of love with their divine Father,

and authentic human life in relationship with their Maker was irreparably corrupted.

To fix the broken, God took on the nature of human flesh, in the form of his Son.

The Son, Jesus, lived in perfect loving relationship with his Father.

But through no fault of his own, Jesus failed.

Instead of his message of love being taken up by his brothers and sisters on earth and this love conquering all, his way and message of love was rejected by humankind.

He was murdered.

He died because his living out of the central truth about God's love was an affront to humanity's self-centredness and power.

He was brutally, hatefully and unjustly slaughtered.

His Father responded to this appallingly unjust atrocity,

not with horrendous divine, lethal and vengeful judgement on humanity, NO!

Rather, God rose above his anger and grief, at the loss of his beloved, and responded with pure love.

God gifted new life to his Son – the life he deserved.

And with the triumph of that Resurrection, came the most astonishing miracle of all:

God granted new life to us all, to the whole of creation!

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!

All praise be to God; the Father, the Son and the Spirit, One God, in love, forever!

Weekly, daily, no hourly, we live and breathe the truth that Jesus, the Son of Man, dwelt here, on earth, truly 100% human, teaching us about the nature and being of God, his Father, which is pure love. He died for us, rose anew for us, defeated death and granted new life to all.

So,....

³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (From Romans 8)

HYMN TiS 611: God of Grace and God of Glory

Prayers Of The People Prepared by Mardie - *Today's prayers of the people are adapted from a prayer by Janet Nelson.*

Let us pray

Ever-living, ever-loving God, we give you thanks that you sent your Son to be our way, our truth and our life: in confidence we bring to you our prayers for all your people.

We pray for your world: for those who live in places scarred by conflict and war – we think especially of Ukraine, Sudan, Palestine; for those who live in places ravaged by disease and famine – we think especially of the millions of people experiencing hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Malawi, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria.

We give thanks for all whose lives manifest your spirit of reconciliation and peace: for peace-keepers, aid workers, conservationists and all who work for a just and sustainable

world. At this time, we pray especially for our Indigenous Australian peoples and for all who work to improve their quality of life. Inspire us all to look beyond our own vested interests to support the formal recognition of Indigenous Australians – our First Peoples – and to provide them with a voice to parliament, that policy decisions which affect them may be more appropriate and more effective. Righteous God, dwell in us, that our lives may proclaim your works.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We pray for our community: for our families, our friends and our church family; for all whose work sustains others in this community and in the wider society and the wider world. We pray especially for those who are struggling to make ends meet, to find shelter and to feed their families at this time of tightening economic conditions and for those whose mental health is at risk due to the stresses of life.

We give you thanks for those whose lives shine with your spirit of forgiveness and love; for welfare agencies and for all, who in ways both big and small, bring your love to others. We think of organisations such as the ASRC, the Brigidine Sisters, the Red Cross, Legacy, Foodbank, Lifeline, as well as the countless other organisations and individuals who reach out to those in need. Loving God, dwell in us, that our lives may proclaim your works.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We pray for all in need: for those who know loneliness, anxiety or grief; for those who know pain or sickness and for all who face death. We think especially of the families of Marj Ponsford and Pat Janson and, in a moment of silence we bring to you, others on our hearts and minds. ...

We give you thanks for those whose lives are filled with courage in the face of adversity and for those who spread your tenderness and consolation. Compassionate God, dwell in us, that our lives may proclaim your works.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We give you thanks for your followers of every age: for Stephen and all who have given their lives for you; for those whose lives have drawn others to you. We take a moment to reflect on those whose words and examples drew each of us into your family. ...

Lead us in your way and open us to your truth, that, with all your saints, we may be brought to the place of everlasting life, which you prepare for all your people. Ever-living, ever-loving God, dwell in us, that in our living and at our dying we may proclaim your works.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Let us pray together, the Lord's 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 for ever. Amen.

Amen.

HYMN TIS 380: Yours be the Glory

Dismissal

Go now, and proclaim the reign of God.
Do not let bodily desires enslave you,
do not be seduced by the values of the world,
but live by the Spirit.
Use your God given freedom to grow in love for all sisters and brothers.

Blessing

And may God reach out to you and save you;
May Christ Jesus give you a double portion of his Spirit;
And may the Holy Spirit bear fruit within you
and guide you in all your ways.
Amen.

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Word Of Mission

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.

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NEWS & NOTICES