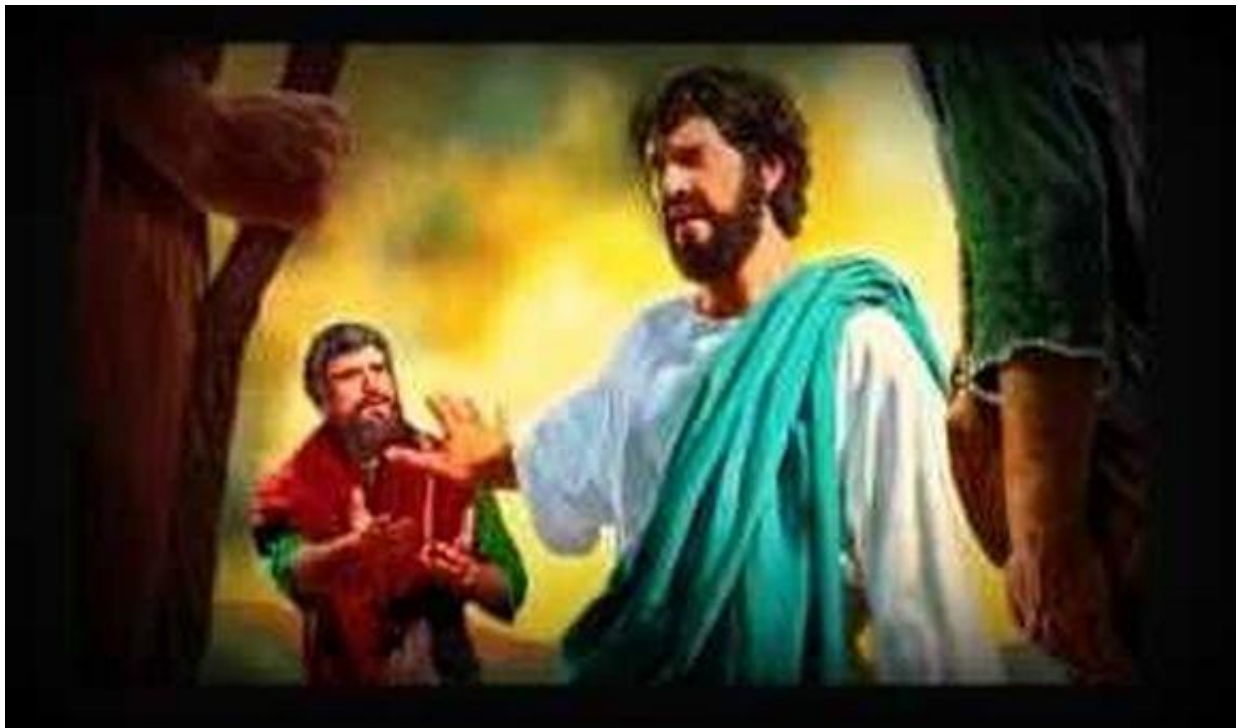


ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



03 SEPTEMBER 2023

PENTECOST 14



WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Set aside 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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

In the Dreaming, the Spirit of God brought forth the blessing of Ancient Life through Mother Earth. Ground Beings were given breath and rhythm... the offspring of the heart of God! This place was tended by the Boonwurrung People – people of this Ground and this Land's rhythms. We give thanks for their custodianship and honour their Elders – past, present and future.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Followers of Christ, God calls us just as we are to live as truth-tellers and gospel-bringers in the world.

God, we know you call us, and still, we ask, "Who am I that you would call me?"

Like Moses standing before the burning bush convinced of his unworthiness to lead your people out of bondage, we ask,

"Who am I that you would call me?"

Like Peter who thought he got it right only to realize that who Jesus is doesn't meet his expectations of who a Savior should be, we ask,

"Who am I that you would call me?"

As we raise this question to God today, we open our hearts to receive God's answer:

You are my beloved children. You are my disciples. You are my people called to share the love of God for the transformation of the world. Amen.

**HYMN TiS 331: Sing my Tongue, the Glorious Battle:
V1, V5 as a refrain, V3, V5 as a refrain, V6.**

PRAYERS OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

ADORATION

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

CONFESSION

You keep talking about dying, Jesus;
about how life is found
not by white-knuckled clinging;
but by a prodigal losing.

We nod and smile, and ponder the deep significance of these words,
and then, with a slow sigh of relief,
we go back to our life-preservers;
our safe, protected worlds;
our well-sheltered, comfortable spirituality;
and we turn our eyes away from those who reach out to us,
those we could touch with Your life,
if only we would take the risk.

What were you thinking, Jesus?

Surely faith is about finding life,
not laying it down?

Surely, we need to follow You in order to be sure
that life doesn't end when we die?

There'll be no dying today, Jesus – not if we can help it.

And if your promise is to be believed;
no dying at all – ever.

If only we could keep away the images of those others,
the different, the lonely, the misunderstood, and the forgotten,
the hungry, the abused, the least;
the ones in whose eyes we glimpse, in unguarded moments,
the outline of Your face;
the ones in whose silence we hear a sound,
not unlike Your voice,
inviting us to carry a cross.

(Silence)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

We have not been called to this hour of worship to wallow in sin and self-pity. God has promised to forgive our sins when we confess them and to cleanse us from all manner of unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Rise from your knees as children of God, forgiven from sin and empowered to lead holy lives.

AMEN, thanks be to God!

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD:

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

A light to our path

EXODUS 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down

to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹²He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” ¹³But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

MATTHEW 16: 21-28

²¹From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” ²³But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? ²⁷“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

SONG: Jesus Asked One Day

1. Jesus asked one day, "What do others say?
Who do people tell you that I am?"
His disciples said, "John — back from the dead,
Or a prophet sent by God's own hand."
Refrain:
*Lord and Savior, you are the One who bore the cross;
May we follow, serving you no matter what the cost.*
2. He said, "Tell me, then, who you say I am."
Peter answered, "You are God's own Son."
Jesus said, "You Rock! You're the building block
That my church will be established on."
Refrain
3. Jesus told his friends, "See how love extends:
I must suffer, die and then be raised."
Peter disagreed: "That can never be.

God's Messiah will know glorious days!"

Refrain

4. Jesus said to him, "Get behind me, then.

Those who cling to life will surely die.

Come and follow me! I will make you free.

Seek God's kingdom and you'll find new life."

Refrain

SERMON:

I am sure I don't have to tell you that life has lots of pressure points.

Here's a few: Illness! Not enough Money! Work! Mental stress! Conflicts! Expectations! Big Events! Bills, Bills Bills! Fatigue!

Pressure comes in all shapes and forms.

Like the little boy who has the part of Jesus in the Sunday School play. The play is the story of Jesus walking on the water. The little boy only has one line, where Jesus says, 'It is I, be not afraid!'

So, what happens? First, his older brother puts pressure on him. He says: 'If you say the wrong thing then you'll just sink straight through the floor and never be heard of again!' And then walks away laughing his head off. Then his parents insist he practice his line, not once, but over and over and over again, more pressure!

Then Just before he goes on stage the SS superintendent points his finger at the boy in a rather intimidating manner and says, 'Now, Son, make sure you get that line right – we're depending on you!'

Then he goes on stage, looks out at the audience, his bottom lip trembles and he blurts out, "It's me, I'm scared stiff and I'm out of here!" And bolts off stage.

Pressure!

Last week we heard Peter respond amazingly to Jesus' question – 'Yes, but who do **YOU** say I am?!' Peter replies: 'The Messiah – Son of the living God!' And Jesus praises Peter for his faithful insight!

So, now Jesus knows these men, his disciples, his mates, are beginning to understand his mission, and thus, feels freer to declare what the heart of his Mission is, namely, that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things at the hands of the elders, teachers of the law and chief priests, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to new life.

In effect, Jesus is sharing the HUGE PRESSURE he is under, with those he trusts and hopes will understand.

He might have been thinking: "SURELY THESE DEVOTEES OF MINE WILL GET IT NOW?!".

But when Jesus, now confident that Peter and the other disciples might understand what the Messiah is, and what the Messiah must do, begins to spell it out, Peter, FAILS - fails to express solidarity, support and loyalty and most of all, fails to faithfully understand - rather – he misunderstands and cranks up the PRESSURE on Jesus, even further!

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

Peter's telling-off of Jesus might be expressed as follows: 'Mate, you've got this seriously WRONG! WE KNOW what the Messiah has to do: SET US FREE - and you're the man!'

Pressure, Pressure, Pressure!

Far from the Peter, who just previously, was affirmed as the Rock on which God would build his church. In the twinkling of an eye, he has become the Stumbling Block – a rock of stumbling, rather than insight! Despite Peter (and the others) being the privileged recipients of revelation, they remain enslaved by the conventional views of Messiahship! A mighty Warrior who will rid them of their oppressors!

Pressure, Pressure, Pressure

And how does Jesus handle this extreme pressure – this extreme betrayal of trust? I think he gets angry! ‘GET BEHIND ME SATAN!’

Oh, you know, I can relate to that – when I am under pressure, usually of my own making – I get angry, and I explode – but my angry is different from Jesus’ anger! Mine is about me – it is selfish anger! I’m not getting what I want and verbally lash out!

But for Jesus this outburst is not about himself, his dented pride, his hurt feelings, his losing – NO! It is an outburst against the bastardisation of God’s purposes, God’s love. It is about Jesus challenging the forces of this world attempting to pervert the course of real meaning, purpose and love – real life!

And he’ll have none of it! Jesus will not be diverted from his Father’s calling! So, spitting with rage he confronts Peter:

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Now, pressure often leads to explosions! I learnt that in Physics. Ha, ha – And in life! But explosions wake you up!

Does it wake **YOU** up? *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”*

Jesus will not succumb to the pressure to conform to the patterns and beliefs and demands of the world, rather he chooses the life, which is the Father’s gift – he chooses love, eternal-life-forming love, which is the Father’s gift – AND, if the living out of **that** life, in **that** love, leads to his demise in this life, then so be it. Then so be it – if that’s where his living out of faith in the Father and the Father’s Life and the Father’s love takes him, then so be it!

“you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Please, Please, my friends, let us not succumb to the pressure to shape our lives around human things, to the exclusion of divine life and love! – to the exclusion of his life and his love – that’s our calling – losing our human lives so we open ourselves up to the gracious God-given gift of life and love.

I know this is a strange and topsy turvy way of understanding life: that in giving ourselves away, in giving our life over to God, to the way of Christ, in resisting the pressure to conform to the ways of the world: such as, success, wealth, achievement, recognition, self-righteousness, security, entitlement – bizarrely, we **GAIN** the only life that really matters: the life of giftedness from God, the Loving Father, the life of love at the centre of all we do, think and are.

One commentator put it this way:

So, what God may be wanting us to hear this week is that we are all called to follow Christ to be liberators of others, serving and loving all people, including our enemies, and that as we respond to this call, we must be willing to lay our lives down and embrace the inevitable suffering and sacrifice that will come. Yet, even in the midst

of this tough word is a light of hope. It is in this self-giving love that we find our 'souls' (our true, God-given selves) and we discover true, abundant life. SACREDISE

It's a no-brainer – unless, of course, we let 'the pressure' get to us:

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Release the pressure valve, choose Jesus – and truly LIVE!

AMEN!

HYMN TIS 583: Take Up Your Cross

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS: Di Richter

"As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church community but who are not at worship with us today."

Light the candle

Holy God, in every age you have heard the cries of your people and come to deliver them. Hear our prayers for your world and your church.

We pray for all in places of conflict or hardship, for victims of ethnic and religious hatreds, for refugees and asylum seekers, for first peoples displaced from their lands and for those experiencing economic exploitation or environmental disaster. Especially today we pray for Australians, as we make decisions about our responses to the coming referendum.

Deliver us from hostility and greed that we may share with justice the bounty of the earth and live peaceably with all people.

Holy God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for your church, for your followers in every land, for the churches of this community, for your ministers and people who worship in this place and all who bring your love to others.

Deliver your church from discord and apathy, that we may set aside all that would keep us from you and faithfully proclaim your gospel.

Holy God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for our community, our families and friends, those whom with whom we work and learn, those with legal and political authority and those who are unnoticed and unheard.

Deliver us from prejudice and self-interest, that we may be a loving and hospitable community.

Holy God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for all in need, the homeless and the hungry, the rejected and lonely and those weighed down by anxiety, grief or pain. We pray for the sick and all who care for them.

Deliver us from bitterness and despair, from callousness and indifference, that we may have strength to bear our own adversity and with generous hearts share the joys and sorrows of your people.

Holy God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We give thanks for the lives of your faithful people, for all who have followed you to their life's end. May we, with your disciples of every age, take up our cross and follow you, that, being prepared to give all for you, we may find eternal treasure in your presence.

Holy God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

(Adapted from prayers by Janet Nelson)

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.

HC HYMN TiS 501: Sing My Tongue, the Saviour's
Glory.

BENEDICTION:

Receive this good news: You are beloved children of God, called and equipped to be agents of divine love in the world. And remember, you do not go alone. God goes before you, with you, and behind you wherever you go. Thanks be to God. And the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit continue to shape and fill your life, now and until the end of time.

Amen.

RECESSIONAL HYMN TiS 779: May the Feet of God

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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NEWS & NOTICES