

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



24 SEPTEMBER 2023

PENTECOST 17



A Mighty River
Amos 5: 24

**Let Justice
and Peace Flow**
Season of Creation 2023

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. We join with them all.

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.

Introit- TIS 100 All creatures of our God and king vs 1

Acknowledgement of First Peoples. By Bible Reader Heather Baxter.

We come to meet this morning from all manner of places, and on the Country of diverse Clans and Nations of First Peoples', and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging, and commit ourselves afresh to the journey of justice and reconciliation.

Welcome to Sustainability Sunday in the Season of Creation.

Call to worship.

In Christ we set out from what we have known
Trusting God for each step of the way
Discovering kinship in all who have breath
in feather and scale in bright eyes and song,
in cells' patterns, in blood, flesh and bone!
Come, let us together worship the God of all.¹

Prayer of Approach. *'Through joy and hope'*

L: Sustaining God, through joy and love and hope,
In fellow creatures you look us full in the face.
You delight and challenge, nourish and threaten;
And we, your people, are called to be alert, awake,
and ready to respond.
Fulfilling our place and purpose
our service as creatures
in the tending of all that has breath:
flesh of all flesh which in Christ you chose to be.
As trees breathe out what we breathe in
so in the cycles of life which are cycles of praise
you are given glory.
Dear God and Friend, and Source of wisdom
In this season: blow your Wild Wind
where there's a need to stir us up
Help us to let be
As also to step in
Whatever serves your will for Sky and Soil, Heaven and Earth
For you, not we, are God. **Amen.**²

Hymn TIS 137 For the beauty of the earth vs 1, 2, 4, 5.

Prayer of Confession

God, our creator and healer, we confess that we have sinned;
We have used creation, not cherished it;
We have lived selfishly, not watching the balance of life;

We have been greedy in not sharing earth's gifts;
And our footprints are heavy rather than gentle.
Forgive us the damage that disturbs our planet.
Grant us the grace to live for the world's healing
And our own.

Bless the seasons of the year, -

May they be restored to your order and balance. **R: Amen.**³

Declaration of forgiveness

L: Once we were "dead" to all the things that God hoped for us;
but in God's love we are again brought to life.

Rejoice, dear ones, you are forgiven!

R: Thanks be to God.

Pass the Peace

Old Testament reading (Read by Heather Baxter)

Exodus 16: 2-15

²In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" ⁸Moses also said, "You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord."

⁹Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.'"

¹⁰While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.

¹¹The Lord said to Moses, ¹²"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'"

¹³That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.

Gospel Reading (Read by Heather Baxter)

Matthew 20: 1-16.

²⁰ "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius^[a] for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³ "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸ “‘When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

⁹ “‘The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

¹³ “‘But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶ “‘So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’”

Hymn TIS 668 Touch the earth lightly

Sermon Sustainability Sunday 2023 and INTERACTIVE SUSTAINABILITY ACTIVITY

No doubt, like me, you have heard the Exodus story about God’s provision of quails and manna in the desert for the grumbling escaping Israelites before. They are hungry and thirsty, and so they let their leaders Moses and Aaron have it, criticising their performances as leaders, and doubting God as well. The people say that they were better off as slaves in Egypt, because at least there they were fed. And we know that God responds to the peoples’ needs by sending them quails, (tiny little birds) for their meat (v. 13), and manna, by a process described as “rained down bread from heaven” (v. 4) like “thin flakes like frost” (v. 13). This substance was different to the food that they were used to, so they asked “What is it?” (v.15). And maybe you know that we think manna was a sort of white sweet flaky secretion from the tamarisk tree, which fell in flakes on the desert ground around the trees every night when it became cool. So it is true that God ensured that their immediate physical needs were met while they were on the journey to the Promised Land, as part of God’s plan.

But its supply was not without effort from the Israelites! Have you ever tried de-boning a quail before cooking it?? Or even if you cook a quail with its bones, then you end up with a mess trying to remove the tiny bones from the meat while you eat them! And I wonder how exactly they scrapped up the manna from the ground or from the leaves and branches of the tamarisk trees? Did they carve scrapers and use wooden bowls to collect the manna?

And then Moses and Aaron reminded the Israelites that God provided enough for everyone, and that each person was only to take as much as they needed. So did the collected quails and manna have to be counted and dispersed equally, (or should I say, equitably?) among the people, as each had need.

Have you ever seen the distribution of Aid food amongst a starving group of people proceed calmly and smoothly, and in an orderly manner? Even distributing free food from the Cranbourne UCA Food truck to those in need, who are usually not starving, can be an exercise of polite discipline by the volunteer distributors, so that everyone gets what they need, rather than some people getting a lot more than others! And if the food is a special sweet treat, like iced buns or chocolate, well, I can assure you when helping on the Truck I have had to call out some folks who keep returning, trying for seconds, thirds, fourths and fifth helpings to eat by themselves! In some cultures, repeated begging is acceptable and normal, as is not waiting politely in lines, but pushing in and clammering to get first go. So I can imagine the major distribution job for Moses, Aaron and their helpers must have been a really tough job! But it was necessary then, and it is necessary for Christians TODAY.

Secondly, in Matthew 20:1-16, *The farm labourers’ tale*, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who at different times of the day brings workers into the vineyard for the harvest. Jesus uses the story to

illustrate that God, through Christ, is opening the kingdom of heaven to all, even those not previously thought of as part of the kingdom. But for many people this story is emotionally hard to hear, because there is a perceived injustice in the workers earning the same amount of money, even though they had not all worked the same amount of hours. So Jesus is saying that in the kingdom of God, all receive the same salvation, based on God's grace, and not the number of hours worked or the length of time we given in the service of our Lord.

But this story also hints at other emotionally difficult issues as it tells the story of injustice in some agrarian societies, highlighting the marginalisation of seasonal workers, the unequal land tenure rights of workers and income inequality across the board in our society.

But because today is Sustainability Sunday, I will focus on some of the ethical dilemmas associated with our food production systems and climate change. The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that in 2023 more than 345 million people globally today face high levels of food insecurity, more than double the 2020 amount. One of the biggest drivers of hunger is conflict. WFP estimate that 70% of hungry people live in areas of conflict and many have been driven off the land through conflict and the impacts of climate change.⁴

Our food production systems today are also heavily influenced by private entities pursuing profits through the sale of Genetically Modified seeds. It is well documented that these seeds, and the herbicide they are associated with, are harmful to the soil and the organisms that live in the soil. The unjust practices associated with GM seeds have also led to farmers being driven off their land through unethical business practices and land grabs in the name of food production.

These are just two examples that show how our modern farming practices have deepened the alienation of people from the land. Add to this, urbanization, food dumping and global supply chains and we have to acknowledge the reality that we are no longer connected to where our food comes from, nor can we control the quality of what we are eating or who has access to what is being produced.

This week I listened to a podcast on the ABC radio called “The Future of religion — A changing climate”, broadcast on Thu 14 Sep 2023 at 3:00pm. The speakers were **Dr Philip Jenkins**, a professor of history at Baylor University in the United States, and co-director for Baylor's Program on Historical Studies of Religion in the Institute for Studies of Religion. He is the author of *Climate, Catastrophe, and Faith: How Changes in Climate Drive Religious Upheaval*. And **Dr Sureka Goringe**, who is National Director of UnitingWorld, the international aid and partnerships agency of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Dr Jenkins gave an overview of the historical climate events such as a series of very cold seasons in the thirteenth century leading to famine and the deaths of nearly 30% of Finland's society, or the 17th century weather changes causing the Irish Potato Famine and subsequent migrations of people, and the effects of geological events like volcanic eruptions and meteorological events like cyclones. And then he showed the correlation with swift and radical changes in religions and cultures in different societies as a result of climatic changes.

He pointed to the rise of “othering”, or scapegoating, or blaming others for causing the ills the society was experiencing. Sometimes God or the gods were blamed for the disasters and climate related problems, and the people lost hope. Other times, more fundamentalist or simplistic options were given, as in, if the gods caused the disasters, then humans have offended them, and so we must sacrifice things or other people to appease their wrath.

Dr Sureka Goringe, from Uniting World, then told of the challenges for food, health and social stability faced in many Pacific countries now. She pointed out that the Pacific people are now worse off than the Exodus Israelites, because they are being permanently displaced by climate disasters and encroaching sea levels caused by climate change. They can no longer return to a former place, because it is under water, or unable to produce food.

She said as a result, a lot of leadership stress is experienced by the ministers of the local Christian churches, because the people are traumatised, asking ‘Why has God allowed this to happen to them?’ Because they do

not understand that it is human sin that has allowed climate change to grow so much, that the glaciers and ice shelves have melted and their flat islands are being inundated with salt. (Photos on Power-point)

Often they have nowhere to go in times of disaster, except to their church buildings. And sometimes even the church buildings are destroyed too. So the Uniting Church is training the pastors in disaster emergency care for their people, developing theological resources in their languages to help them understand it is not God causing climate change, but humans, and then strengthening the church people and their buildings by anchoring walls and roofs, adding ramps for the hurt and disabled, and making it possible for people to survive cyclones, earthquakes and rising tides.

So I invite us to think about a few questions today- *When we celebrate Holy Communion, do we know where exactly the bread and wine comes from? Do we know under what conditions the labourers live and work? Do we know the land management practices of the farmer? How could we, as the church, have a better say in food production practices and the need to ensure that all God's people are fed?*

There are things we can do ourselves to make a start, which are included in an Interactive Sustainability Guide. (on Powerpoint.) Do we act in these ways? Can we learn new ways to help? Amen.

Additional Material

World Food Programme – <https://www.wfp.org/> Food Tank – <https://foodtank.com/>
Book: “Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation by William” F. Engdahl <https://www.amazon.com/Seeds-Destruction-Hidden-Genetic-Manipulation/dp/0973714727>
TEDxMasala – Dr Vandana Shiva – Solutions to the food and ecological crisis facing us today. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ER5ZZk5atIE>
Theology of Food: 4 Themes From Scripture <https://naptimetheologian.com/theology-of-food/>
<https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/creation-time/>

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of all people, of all creatures; we thank you for the world that you have created, where each ecosystem lives in delicate balance, and where the world produces the food and the clean water that we all need to sustain life. The bounty of the harvest is a testament to the wonder of creation. And yet we know that all creation is groaning. The weather isn't what it was and that throws out the created balance, making it harder for farmers to grow the food we all need. Thank you for the efforts of people locally, nationally and globally to care for your world, for the people who use their creative energy to work for solutions, for the people who raise their voices to call for justice, for the people who make small changes every day to tread more lightly on the earth. May we all learn to live simply, so that others can simply live. Amen⁵

LITANY FOR HOPE AND BLESSING

God, bless all who know the value of the land and who have the courage to put themselves on the line. **God, bless them.**

God, bless the indigenous peoples of our world who stand up for their land and culture and spirituality. **God, bless them.**

God, bless the indigenous and other Australians speaking out against widespread gas fracking in the Kimberly's and Northern Territory. **God, bless them.**

God, bless the artists, film-makers, presenters and others who use their talents and vision to move people to wonder and action. We give thanks for people internationally like Sir David Attenborough who has shown us some of the wonders of the living world, and locally, presenters like Craig Reucassel in the 'War on Waste', who has modelled local concern and action. **God, bless them.**

God, bless people working in organisations like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, the World Wildlife Fund and others who campaign for a healthier world. Bless too the work of the Climate Council and the voice of ARRCC - the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change. **God, bless them.**

God, bless those politicians and leaders who are prepared to make decisions that value the earth and its creatures above profits and the power of corporations. **God, bless them.**

God, bless each one of us in our efforts to recycle more and consume less. Bless us as we work for change and follow courageously in the footsteps of Jesus, Our Lord. Bless us and all the world, we pray. **Amen.**

Announcements

Offering.

L: The life of God is one in which acts of kindness are honoured.

Let us bring our gifts to God.

OFFERTORY PRAYER:

O God, we believe that, after our prayers are said and our hymns are sung, you wait for offerings which enable good to be done.

In that spirit, we bring you our gifts this day.

Receive them and use them, we pray. **Amen.**⁶

Prayers of the People. Prepared by Warwick Barry.

"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*

Creator God each leaf, each petal, each grain, each person,
sings your praises,. Each creature on the earth, all the mountains and great seas, show your glory, Spirit of love.

And yet, the hand of greed has patented and plundered your splendour, has taken and not shared your gift, has lived as owner of the earth, not guest.

We lament the loss of our fellow species and their habitats, we grieve the loss of human cultures, along with the lives and livelihoods that have been displaced or perished, and we ache at the side of an economy of death, war, and violence that we have inflicted on ourselves and on the earth.

And so, the ice is cracked, the rivers dry up and are too low for good health, the forests are consumed by fire, the valleys flooded and the snow caps and polar glaciers melt, the sea levels rise threatening those who live on small islands and continents alike.

God our Father, show us how to step gently, how to live simply, how to walk lightly with respect and love for all that you have made.

Blessed are those whose lifestyle choices and actions are making a great difference to Mother Earth and inspiring all of us to adopt a better way of living for all peoples sake and future generations.

Blessed are those who use low energy light bulbs
for theirs is the light of God's wisdom.

Blessed are those who travel by train (and other public transport)
for their lives are on God's track.

Blessed are those who choose a car with a non polluting engine & low fuel consumption
for they are in God's fast lane.

Blessed are those who insulate their homes
for theirs is the warmth of God's love.

Blessed are those who put themselves out
to use energy from renewable sources,
for they have kindled the flame of the future.

Blessed are those who recycle, reuse and repurpose things, for they seek to save the earth from being filled with wasteful and costly landfill.

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world, and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain, at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature,

As we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us we pray in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

Bless us to walk together with all people of goodwill, so that the many streams of the living waters of God's, justice and peace may become a mighty river all over the earth.

In the name of the one who came to proclaim, good news to all creation, Jesus Christ.

Amen

(Adapted from UCA & ARRC)

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 forever. Amen.

Hymn TIS 690 Beauty for brokenness


Commissioning and Benediction.

In you may every family of all the Earth be blessed.
In you each ecosystem and habitat be blessed.
In you, by faith be wildlife and wilderness be blessed.
And you, through Christ, shine brightly
That all the earth be blessed.
Go in peace now to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ.

Amen

Recessional hymn- TIS 672 Lord of earth and all creation

VS 1.



Sustainable Sunday

for the Season of Creation

24 September 2023

SUSTAINABILITY GAME – Ask a question from each square to those in the room. As you get a match cross off a square. See how many squares you can get ticked off in a row.

Grows some vegetables in their garden	Turns off appliances at the powerpoint	Uses some natural products for cleaning	Uses a dishwasher	Enjoys nature
Buys local produce where possible	Has native plants in their garden	Turn tap off while cleaning teeth	Sometimes uses public transport	Has a worm farm
Uses the library to borrow books or puzzles	Rides or walks work or school	Donates to a second hand shop	Dries clothes on a clothesline	Reuses plastic and glass items.
Has a solar system or heat pump	Has a compost heap	Mends or fixes items	Use your own shopping bags.	Willing to learn more about environmental issues.
Uses a water saving shower rose.	Uses recycled paper for printer	Reuses wrapping paper & gift bags	Try not to use chemicals in the garden.	Uses a refillable water bottle

¹ [Sustainable-Sunday-2023-Service-Outline-Formatted.pdf](#) Accessed 19 Sept 2023 UCA WA Synod.

² Prayer for Season of Creation, by Val Brown, Head of Christian Aid Scotland.

³ Chris Polhill. *Bare Feet and Buttercups* Wild Goose Publications, 2008

⁴ <https://preachingforgodsworld.org/season-of-creation-week-four/> Notes by **Rev Shaun Cozett** is the Rector of St Paul's Bree Street in the Diocese of Cape Town, South Africa.

⁵ Prayer for Season of Creation, by Val Brown, Head of Christian Aid Scotland

⁶ Words for Worship Mediacom 2005.

Postlude

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

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Presider: Revd Wendy Snook

Music: Peter Hurley

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Tuesdays, 9.30am-1.30pm

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NEWS & NOTICES