

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



1 OCTOBER 2023

PENTECOST 18



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 745 Seek ye first vs 1 and chorus

Acknowledgement of First Peoples. By Bible Reader Lisa Safin.

Welcome

Call to worship.

L: Our trust is in God, in God alone.

We rejoice in God's love for us and all people.

Let us worship God, who is our refuge and strength and the source of justice and peace.¹

Prayer of Approach

L: Ever-present God, we come here today to learn a bit more of what is your will for us, for our world and for all of creation.

Open our hearts to your words of life that we might hear and open our minds to imagine the deeds we might do as your Spirit of grace dwells and grows within us.

Amen.²

Hymn TIS 228 Crown him with many crowns vs 1, 2, 6.

Prayer of Confession

L: Merciful God, when we fail to work towards establishing conditions which allow justice to flower and mercy to flourish in people's lives;

forgive us.

L: When our satisfaction with the status quo dulls our capacity to grieve over the injustices suffered by so many people in our society;

forgive us.

L: When we collaborate with those who exploit workers in sweatshops by buying their products;

forgive us.

L: When we become so deeply attached to the quest for wealth and power that we do not hear Jesus' words about the impossibility of serving both God and wealth addressed to us;

forgive us.

L: When achieving prosperity becomes a higher priority than tackling the causes of poverty;

forgive us

L: Strengthen us, O God, to withstand the seduction of a society which seems obsessed with the acquisition of wealth and power, too often at the expense of the poor and powerless. Help us to live as Jesus did, in solidarity with those who have lost hope of anything good or just happening in their lives.

This we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.** ³

Declaration of forgiveness

L: We believe that Jesus was sent by God into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him.

Those who believe in him are not condemned. (John 3:17,18)

R: Thanks be to God.

Pass the Peace

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Old Testament reading Read by Lisa Saffin

Exodus 17:1-7

¹The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

³But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

⁴Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

⁵The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷And he called the place Massah^[a] and Meribah^[b] because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Gospel Reading Read by Lisa Saffin

Matthew 21:23-32

²³Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

²⁴Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

²⁹"'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

³¹"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Sermon: Nostalgia or Hope?

Have you ever had problems with your memory? I know I have. Not just comparatively small things like missing my mobile phone somewhere round the house, or missing the car keys. But what about more important things? like what was the date of your wedding anniversary? Maybe it was a long time ago, you know! ☺ or even more

important things still, like what it is like to know who you are, and what you are called to be? And who is God to you?

And then there is the problem of remembering things differently than what really happened at the time, because so much time and so many events have happened since. Sometimes we remember the worst things of the past, like the time we really embarrassed ourselves in public or felt really hurt or alone. Then at other times, we remember the past as rosier and happier than it really was. You know, remembering a past seaside holiday as though it had a golden haze over the camera, and you have forgotten about the mozzies and the dirty toilets in the caravan park, and the struggle to keep the kids entertained on wet days.

In my own case, I have many exciting, indeed thrilling stories from my single days many years ago about working in the outback of Western Australia as an exploration geologist, including helping find the Argyle Diamond mine in the Kimberley. But do I like thinking about my Pilbara experiences with venomous scorpions in my boots in the morning, or the thick drifts of bulldust washing like orange-red waves over the bonnet of our four-wheel drive, or the thick mud bogging our trucks, or about the spinifex grass' sharp points targeting tender spots of my anatomy! I just don't want to think about it!

It was like that for the Israelites who had escaped the Egyptians and followed Moses out into the desert. You might remember part of the story from last week. An entire nation, thousands of people, were delivered from certain death when God made a way for them through the Red or Reed Sea. God heard their prayers and made it happen, through the strong east wind blowing and the tide pulling the waters back long enough to let the Israelites cross, and the Egyptians to bog their chariots in the muddy tidal flats as the tide returned. But then, the story says, they forget!

Within a few chapters and verses from Exodus 15 to Exodus 17, the miracles have 'worn off'.

Last week we heard God provided the people with quails and manna in the desert to be fed. Now in this week's story. the Israelites are still out in the desert, where it is rough going into the mountains and very dry. Their mouths are parched, the kids are whinging and dragging their feet, and all they want is a nice big river, or water hole, or lake to sit down and kick off their sandals and rest. But out there in the desert the facilities are sorely lacking. Even today the desert areas leading into the Sinai and south Jordan around Petra are pretty dry and very rugged.

(Show ppt photos 1,2 3 - south Jordan, scene, old arch, and gorges leading into Petra.)

The Israelites get thirsty, and again they reminisce about the food back in Egypt. Their empty bellies between the morning and evening arrivals of manna and quails cause them to have nostalgia about their slavery. This is one of the signs you have really lost it; when you start to idealise the past, and your past involved being a slave to the Egyptian Pharaoh. "Back in the good 'ole days, when we spent all day making bricks and building pyramids, when we had no rights, and the Pharaoh occasionally killed all our male children, *those were the days..*" Sounds like a Monty Python skit, doesn't it!)

In slavery, every day is the same. There is something comfortable about the suffering, because it is predictable. Freedom can be much more trying. Out there in the wilderness, when they have to depend on God, when they are in uncharted territory, there is no predictability! They wake up every day having to trust that God will provide, and that God is going to lead them somewhere. As writer Brian Erickson said, 'They are suffering from 'post-miraculous stress disorder'!'

The Israelites are trapped in rosy re-visions of their past, and almost blind to the constant provision of God around them. They are numbed, trapped in the spiritual lands of Massah (meaning "test") and Meribah (meaning 'to find fault'). They wander in mind and body in their grumbling, and it should be no surprise that they go in circles for forty years! Yet while they were stuck in bitterness and regret, God did another miracle through Moses and provided for their needs for fresh clean water through a swiftly flowing spring. And according to the Jordanians, that spring is still flowing today. It still flows today from a small cliff face in Jordan, by the side of the King's Highway, the main road south towards Petra. And there beside the road later was built a small building for people to come and drink and wash in the spring water. Roy and I have put our hands and toes in its water! (Show two ppt slides of Moses' spring and the building's flowing open channel of water.)

Now the problem with nostalgia about the past is that it never leads you forward, because nostalgia casts an impossible standard; a sugar-coated, much improved rendering of what once was. It is like the automatic airbrushed enhancement feature that people use in selfie photos and in Zoom. The reality is that you never really look like that touched up selfie picture now, and when in future you look back at yourself in those photos, don't get depressed about your aging appearance, because you never did really look like that selfie in the first place!!

Nostalgia, or "wanting things to go back to the way they were", as we think we remember them, is like "Egypt 2.0, with the warts and the thorns removed". The present can never match an idealised past, leaving us stuck in the quicksand of our edited memories, perpetually ungrateful for the place we now find ourselves. It is one of the Enemies of Gratitude, and its name is Nostalgia.

This 'post-miraculous stress disorder' still strikes God's people today. In fact, maybe we are more prone to do it than other people, because so often faithful Christians remember earlier days with revisionist rosy glasses. Whether it is holding onto the 'good ole' days' of the large church of our youth (which ceased to exist many years ago), or clinging to a season of our own lives, like the times before the pandemic lockdowns, nostalgia quietly steals our joy and makes us blind and indifferent to the miracles God is doing for us right now. Miracles, like the metaphorical 'flowing streams of living water' that God has provided here in this place and time, like God's presence with us in the bread and wine of Communion.

The Exodus people asked "Is God with us or not?" In Holy Communion, we can say, "Yes! Through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, God is with us now!" And God will hear our prayers and help us again, not just as individuals, but as tribes and peoples and nations, if we ask. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People. By Mardie Townsend

"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

Dear Father God,

It saddens our hearts to see the great suffering of your beloved children in the world. We think of those suffering as the result of natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts and associated famines, floods, bushfires and tornadoes. The war in Ukraine, conflicts in the Middle East and in Africa leave many dead, injured, homeless or stateless. And climate change threatens the homes and livelihoods of many in the Pacific Islands and other places. Our news coverage shows us shocking images, but we often fail to understand how we can help or simply don't get around to helping. Give us grace, Lord, to do what we can to alleviate their suffering and inspire us to put pressure on our governments to be more generous in areas such as foreign aid and refugee policy.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

We bring to mind all those in our own country and our own community who find themselves in a hard place. We especially pray for those who suffer physically with illness or injury, for those who experience mental health disorders, for those who are bereaved and those who are dying. In a moment of silence, we bring before you those known to us who need your healing. ... And we pray for those who struggle to access the care they need: those in remote communities, including so many Indigenous Australians; those whose financial struggles mean that they cannot afford the care they need; those whose calls to emergency services have not resulted in timely responses. Help us to walk a mile in their shoes and to use our votes and our opportunities for giving to charities to ensure that their needs are more appropriately met.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Lord, in our relative affluence, we think of those who are struggling to make ends meet: those who have lost their homes due to rising interest rates; those who can't afford three meals a day; those whose children miss out on school excursions, sport or other extra-curricular activities because there is simply no money to spare. We give thanks for those in this congregation who established and maintain the Little Free Pantry, and for the community members who contribute to the Pantry; and we give thanks for those who have helped us to provide

food vouchers for those in need. Through your Holy Spirit, breathe on us and on all who help the needy, so that we and they may continue to minister to others as you have commanded us to do.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Lord, it disturbs us when we see political leaders embracing division instead unity, pursuing wealth instead of justice and spreading lies instead of speaking the truth. Amidst the Voice campaign, we pray that all involved will act with integrity and generosity, setting aside fear and self-interest, so that reconciliation, justice and peace may be advanced. We lift all those in significant leadership to you. Come guide their thoughts and their actions, protect them from the influence of the realms of darkness and sweep away any corruption.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

These prayers we pray in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.
Amen

Holy Communion

Offering.

L: Lord, what we have, we offer: our time, our commitment, our money. But most of all we offer ourselves. Help us to be used in Your work, to encourage each other in giving and serving, and to extend Your given kingdom of love; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.⁴

Invitation

Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God! This is the Lord's Table. Our Saviour invites all believers, young and old alike, to share with Him in Holy Communion. Let us come to the Table with thanksgiving. Let the bread become for us the bread of life, and the wine—the cup of the New Covenant.

The great thanksgiving and Institution and setting apart of the elements

L: When our Risen Lord was at table with His disciples, He took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised Him. From that day onwards they gave witness to the Risen Lord through Word and Sacrament. Today we do the same.

L: The Lord be with you!

P: AND ALSO WITH YOU!

L: Lift up your hearts.

P: WE LIFT THEM TO THE LORD.

L: Holy God, we praise You!

P: LET THE HEAVENS BE JOYFUL, AND THE EARTH BE GLAD!

L: It is indeed right to give you our thanks and praise, O God, for with the passion of a lover you have delivered us from slavery to sin and death.

You are the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth,
and it is your Word that brings life into bloom.
You called your servant Rebbekah to leave family and country,
and from her loving union with Isaac,
you brought forth a people to delight in your ways.
You led those people through the dry harsh deserts in the Exodus
and provided them with food and water when they were in need.

You sent among us your child, Jesus the Christ,
and in him you revealed yourself to us.
Though we were burdened and wearied by sin,
and unable to dance to your song, in gentleness and humility
he lifted our burdens and showed us the way of wisdom.
When he was killed, you raised him to life,
rescuing us all from our bodies of death
and giving us rest for our souls. ⁵

Therefore, with all of God's people in heaven and on earth,
we praise your glorious name saying/singing ...

**PEOPLE: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest. AMEN.**

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

L: O Lord, as we gather in praise and thanksgiving, we remember the cost and the victory it brought about. We remember how on the night before his passion, Jesus took bread and gave you thanks - as even now we give thanks to you, O God, for this bread, saying: "Take and eat: this is my body, which will be broken for you."
We recall as well how, in the same way, when the meal was over, he took the cup, the cup of blessing, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
"Take and drink: This is my blood, the blood of a new covenant for the forgiveness of sin.... When you do this, do it in memory of me."
Remembering the Lord Jesus, we break bread and share one cup, announcing His death for the sins of the world, and telling His resurrection to all the nations.

**PEOPLE: Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again!**

L: Loving God, send Your Holy Spirit upon us and what we do here that we, and these gifts, may be signs of hope to us and to all the world. Make them for us the body and blood of Christ Jesus, and make us through them the body of Christ in the world. Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour are Yours, Almighty God, now and forever. AMEN.

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.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION & THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

L: On the night of Jesus' arrest and betrayal Jesus took bread,
He blessed and He broke it and He gave it to them, saying,
"Take, eat, this is my body broken for you;
Do this for the remembrance of me." [the bread is broken]
Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread.
In a like manner, after supper, He took the cup,

And again given thanks, He gave it to them, saying,
“Drink of it all of you, for this cup is the new covenant,
sealed by my blood, for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.” [wine is poured, and/or the cup is
raised]

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.
The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.
The gifts of God for the people of God

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world:
HAVE MERCY ON US.
Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world:
HAVE MERCY ON US.
Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world:
GRANT US PEACE.

Hymn TiS 714 – Eat This Bread, Drink This Cup [Taizé Chant]

The distribution

Final prayer.

L: Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN.^{vi}

Hymn TIS 569 Guide me O thou great Redeemer vs 1, 2, 3.

Commissioning and Benediction.

We have experienced the grace of God
as a liberating power in our own lives.
As we go from here, we go to be people who impart
that liberating grace to the world.

May God’s Word be upon our lips; Christ’s way be the path we tread
and the Holy Spirit’s breath give us life. This day and always. ^{vii}
Amen

Recessional hymn- TIS 642 This day God gives me -Tune TIS 156 (Bunessan) vs 1.

¹ Moira Laidlaw -Liturgies Online

² Words for Worship, Mediacom 2020

³ Moira Laidlaw -Liturgies Online

⁴ by Julie M. Hulme, "Companion to the RCL, Vol. 2, p. 134.

⁵ by Nathan Nettleton, Copyright 2002, adapted by Wendy Snook,

<http://www.laughingbird.net/LectureTexts/AP09.html#Eucharistic%20Preface>

^{vi} Holy Communion liturgy based on UIW and prayers 2011 by Rev John Maynard.

^{vii} Words for Worship Mediacom 2020