

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



22 OCTOBER 2023

PENTECOST 21



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 137 For the beauty of the earth vs 1 & 3.

Acknowledgement of First Peoples. By Bible Reader Heather B

Welcome

Call to worship.

L: People tremble and a tremor runs through the whole earth when confronted with the great and majestic power of God.

We praise God's great and holy name.

God's love for the world is revealed in acts of justice and righteousness

We bow down before God's holy presence.

God heard and answered the cries of Moses and Aaron and Samuel.

who experienced God's righteousness as both judgment and grace.

God's word of judgment and grace comes to us still, not in a pillar of cloud, but through the person of Jesus Christ.

We praise God for the Word made flesh present among us, full of grace and truth.ⁱ

Prayer

L: Thank you, God, for all the ways we see you in the world around us:

rainbows, sunsets, howling winds, penguins, shearwater, cape barren geese,

wombats, koalas, ants and flies, manna gums, ti-tree, pigface and our faces.

Help us to remember to dance with delight at the gift of life and your constant presence.

We pause to give you gratitude from deep in our hearts

for all of life, and our small part in it.

(pause)

When we forget to look for you and get lost in the shadows of fear,

Forgive us, **forgive us**

When we lose our sense of wonder, and see only harm and hate,

Forgive us, **forgive us**

When we fail to be your people and bear your image always,

Forgive us, **forgive us**

Siblings in Christ,

we glimpse God's glory

shining through our muddled messes

and know that we are forgiven.

P: We are blessed and restored.

Thanks be to God, Amen!ⁱⁱ

Hymn TIS 154 Great is your faithfulness

Pass the Peace

L: May the Peace of God dwell with you:

P: and also with you.

Reader: Lord, may your Word live in us.

All: And bear much fruit to your glory!

Old Testament reading:

Exodus 33:12-23 (Read by Heather Baxter)

¹² Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’” ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

¹⁴ The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

¹⁸ Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.”

¹⁹ And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”

²¹ Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 22: 15-22 (Read by Heather Baxter)

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax^[a] to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

²¹ “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Hymn TIS 751 What does the Lord require of you?

Sermon

The Uniting Church was among the advocates for a YES vote at last weekend’s Voice referendum. Many sporting clubs and corporate businesses took a similar stance, all drawing the ire of those who believe that they should have stayed out of ‘politics’. It’s a common theme. How many times have politicians told the church to butt out of the issue of the day? I’m sure our Synod’s Justice Unit would have many stories to tell of push-back from those in power when it comes to issues like gambling, advertising or asylum seeker policy.

Many years ago, my Ministry Student mentor was a former Moderator of the UCA in WA, and he told me of the time he was called into the WA Premier’s office and given a dressing down. About that time, the Uniting Church supported the Indigenous protest about the development plans for the former Swan Brewery site on the Swan River, which was a recognised sacred site for the Nyungar people. It was a place where according to legend, the Waggyl, or Dream time serpent, the Creator for the Nyungars, rested, like in the Seventh day in our Old Testament creation story. For the developers to build a planned casino on the site was tantamount to building a casino on a sacred church site like Westminster Cathedral. And if we didn’t say anything, the government would allow developers or transport authorities to build on our sacred places too. And the basic message from the WA Premier was that the Uniting Church should “butt out of the government’s business and stick to preaching on Sundays!”

It’s an old tactic for power to say, “Stick to your own business of personal religion– politics belongs to politicians, the things of God belong to the church and the two shouldn’t mix.” It’s a message which is almost a retelling of this parable Jesus shared, described in Matthew 22 – “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s, (meaning give to ‘Caesar’ which was the title of the Roman Emperors, what belongs to government and empires) and give to God what is God’s.”

Simple enough, isn’t it? Or is it? Some might say it’s perfectly clear, but often those who say that have an interest in belittling the voice of the church, especially when it shines the light on uncomfortable truths.

We hear in the story account that Jesus is being set up. And it’s a clever trap. But Jesus sees the trap and gives them no room to move with his response. But tempting as it is for some people, his short response doesn’t justify a separation of church and state.

Jesus says: Give to God all that is God’s.

So, what is it that actually belongs to God? Does what was once Caesar’s belong to God? Isn’t it everything that belongs to God? It seems that Jesus is delightfully subversive in his answer. He calls us towards the realisation that God has authority over all principalities and powers!

As all things are God’s, then surely it follows that as we follow Jesus Christ, we are to seek God’s will in all things. So rather than justifying the might and power of Rome (or any present-day power) and the ways of empire and governments, the vision that Jesus offers is of God’s rule or God’s kingdom first and foremost. Love, compassion, justice, and mercy – perhaps these are the greatest response possible in the face of governments, and all oppressive human powers.

If we use our faithful voices to speak God’s love, compassion, justice and mercy into the places of public policy, then surely we are living into the kingdom of God. If we speak the same into our relationships, our community, our environment, and our conversation as First and Second

peoples in this land, then surely we are living into the kingdom of God. While that may irritate politicians and maybe family members and friends alike, when applied to situations like the Voice Referendum, there is no reason to call for anything less than for God's love to be made known in all things.

There is one last piece of this parable worth considering. The image of the current Caesar Tiberias was imprinted onto the coin, with Jesus concluding that therefore the coin belonged to Caesar. Even today we have an image of the Queen Elizabeth II and soon it will be the King Charles III on our coins to indicate the government's ownership of our coinage.

And in the Exodus passage we find that Moses is imprinted with God's glory, or perhaps, God's image. If we as Christians bear the image of God, there is a powerful realisation that in all we say and do, we live and bear the image of God to others.

Think what it meant, when God said, "I will do as you ask. I'll go. I will go with you!" The Promise of the Presence! Who can live without it? Moses asked if he could see God's glory, which is like saying he wanted to see God's face. God told Moses that was not possible for a human being, but, as a special blessing, God would show Moses' God's goodness by passing in front of him while shielding him, and then allowing him to see God from the back. Or in other words, seeing God in hindsight! And so it was for Moses. And so it is for us, too. We, too cannot see God face to face except through the face of Jesus. But we can see God's movement and presence going ahead of us, in hindsight.

Rev Arnie Wieranga, whose wise words inspired this sermon, found a lovely hymn, called *Baited, the Question Rose*, written by Carl P. Daw Jr, based on the Matthew 22 reading, that ends with these words, which I would like to use as a prayer now:

May we discern, O God,
your daily gifts of grace;
show us your image freshly coined
in every heart and face.
Help us fit tribute yield
through prayers and hymns we raise,
but most of all by deeds of love
to give you thanks and praise.ⁱⁱⁱ

Amen.

Hymn during offering: TiS 717 Give thanks with a grateful heart.

Offering.

L: Gracious God, you stamped your love upon this world forever when you chose to enter it in Jesus Christ. In thanksgiving for such love, we offer these gifts and the witness of our lives as we dedicate ourselves anew to making your love visible through all we say and do in Jesus' name and in the power of your Spirit.

Amen.^{iv}

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A symbol of hope for global unity

United Nations Day, on 24 October, marks the anniversary of the entry into force in 1945 of the UN Charter. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/un-day>

October 24-30 is Disarmament Week -

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/disarmament-week>

+ Assembly prayers after the Voice Referendum to come.

Prayers of the People. Prepared by Marg Davis

"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 Lord Hear us as we bring our prayers to you this morning.

In this season of creation, we give thanks for your world and for our senses, that enable us to appreciate the beauty of all that surrounds us, and we pray for those less fortunate who are unable to experience what many of us take for granted.

Loving God we acknowledge that we are blessed. In this country we have a society with a rich variety of people who have come from near and far. We give thanks for our freedom and pray that we may live together and be kind to one another.

We pray for the worldwide church and all who minister. We thank you for the church in Australia. Inspire us to promote the unity of your church as we pray for all its congregations and its clergy.

We pray for the Federal and State Governments of this country and for all in positions of authority. We hope that they govern wisely, and justly, so that all may live in peace and safety.

Across our world people are in pain, families torn apart, homes and hope destroyed. Atrocities committed, one human against another – all in the name of greed and power. When will our greed for more, and more, give way to feeding and caring about each other, regardless of creed or race?

God of constant presence we pray for our families, neighbours, friends and strangers. We hold before you all who are broken, hurt, lost, lonely and struggling. Help us to reach out with your healing, holding hands, uniting us for the common good. Help us to know your face in the life around us.

We pray for ourselves and for each other and this morning we give thanks for the life of Alice Kaufmann, whose funeral was on Wednesday and we pray for those close to her. We particularly think of members of our congregation who are struggling, or suffering ill health, and also for those who are travelling.

Give us a vision of what we are capable of becoming. We ask that you transform us, so that despite being ordinary people, we become capable of doing extraordinary things.

Let us join together and pray as Jesus taught us:

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.

Go into the world in peace
and shine with God's glory,
Boldly bear the image of love,
radiate hope, preach peace,
kindle connection and be kind
in all that you are and all that you do.
and may the Source, Son and Spirit of life
accompany you, waking and sleeping,
always and ever, Amen. ^v

Recessional hymn- TIS 137 For the beauty of the earth
vs 4 & 6.

Postlude

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

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Presider: Rev Wendy Snook
Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES

ⁱ Based on Psalm 99

ⁱⁱ Rev Jennie Gordon, Shearwater Ministry team, Cowes in Figtree resources, Gippsland Presbytery 2023 for Oct 22.

ⁱⁱⁱ From *Singing the New Testament*, #62, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, 2008, ISBN 978-1-59255-416-

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And [https://hymnary.org/text/baited the question rose](https://hymnary.org/text/baited_the_question_rose) Accessed Oct 18 2023 for the words below.

^{iv} Moira Laidlaw -Liturgies Online

^v Rev Jennie Gordon, Shearwater Ministry team, Cowes in Figtree resources, Gippsland Presbytery 2023 for Oct 22.

Hymn Baited, the Question Rose, written by Carl P. Daw Jr. Sung to tune Diademata. ("Crown him with many crowns.")

1 Baited, the question rose
From somewhere in the crowd:
"Teacher, you truly know God's way;
Is paying tax allowed?"

2 Jesus perceived their trap:
"Why do you test me so?
Bring here the coin the tax requires,
And see what it will show."

3 "Whose image does it bear,
Whose names and titles tell?"
"Caesar's, of course," they smugly said
And thought they answered well.

4 "Give Caesar what is his;
God, what is God's alone."
Strong words, convincing and profound,
Like truth already known.

5 May we discern, O God,
Your daily gifts of grace;
Show us your image freshly coined
In ev'ry heart and face.

6 Help us fit tribute yield
Through prayers and hymns we raise,
But most of all by deeds of love
To give you thanks and praise.
