

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



29 OCTOBER 2023

PENTECOST 22



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 217 (i) Love divine, all loves excelling vs 1.

Acknowledgement of First Peoples.

Welcome

Call to worship.

based on Psalm 90:1-6,13-17

LEADER: Lord, you have been our shelter and security from generation to generation.

PEOPLE: You breathed creation into being, giving shape to mountains and form to the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

LEADER: You have the power to turn us back to dust; a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday to you, or like a brief moment in the night.

PEOPLE: You sweep us away like a dream, like grass which flourishes and grows in the morning, but fades and withers in the evening.

LEADER: Our frailty is revealed when we trust only in ourselves and so fail to number our days wisely.

PEOPLE: Turn to us, O God, for you alone are our hope. Have compassion on us we pray.

LEADER: Help us to begin day after day focussed on your steadfast love, so that each day will be filled with joy and gladness.

PEOPLE: By your mercy and grace, O God, transform our afflictions into blessings and our sinful ways into goodness.

LEADER: Let your work be so visible among us that your glory will be revealed now and for generations to come.

PEOPLE: May your grace, O God, enrich our lives and give meaning and purpose to our daily activities.

Prayer

L: Eternal God, we worship you with hearts full of praise and adoration. You existed before all else and yet, because you are a God of love, you are with us now in Jesus Christ and through the power of your Spirit. Our minds find it difficult to grasp the extent of such love and such grace. You, who created this world with its diverse and colourful landscapes have shown how, in Jesus, you care even for the landscapes of our hearts, our souls and our minds.

Gifted with his life, our lives flourish and grow in ways undreamed of by the psalmist, and fear of withering and dying has been taken away. May our worship, our witness and the service of our lives reveal the extent of our gratitude for these blessings so lovingly bestowed upon us. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. ¹

Hymn TIS 125 vs 1, 3, 6 the God of Abraham praise

Pass the Peace

L: May the Peace of God dwell with you:
and also with you.

First Word : “Papa’s gift” by Kathleen Long Bostrom. Zonderkidz 2002.

Old Testament reading:

Deuteronomy 34: 1-12 (Read by Karen Roberts)

³⁴ Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan, ² all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, ³ the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. ⁴ Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.”

⁵ And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. ⁶ He buried him^[a] in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. ⁷ Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. ⁸ The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

⁹ Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit^[b] of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.

¹⁰ Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, ¹¹ who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. ¹² For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 22: 34-46 (Read by Karen Roberts)

The Greatest Commandment

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^[a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

“The son of David,” they replied.

⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

⁴⁴ “‘The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.””^[c]

⁴⁵ If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶ No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Hymn TIS 751 What does the Lord require of you? (once together, then as a round) Learnt last Sunday.

Sermon Love in all things- Moses’ eulogy and ours.²

You might say that having finished our readings from the book of Exodus for three years, it is our Exodus from Exodus! Yet we are again, in the book of Deuteronomy, reading about who again? – Moses, now on Mt Nebo in Jordan! But this time, it is from the perspective of those who were left behind after Moses’ death. It is a description of Moses’ death, followed by the ‘eulogy’, we would call it, that was read at his funeral. It also is a place of change, as Joshua was appointed as the new leader of the tribes of Israel.

(PPT Photo 1)³ The old story begins with Moses and the people reaching Mt Nebo, atop Pisgah, overlooking the Jordan River valley, and opposite and along a bit from the city of Jericho, which already existed there. But Moses

is old and tired now, as he talks with God. And he knows he will not make it to the Promised land across the river. But as the writer of Deuteronomy points out, this was not to be understood as a failure. As he overlooks the valley, Moses takes possession of the land he could see, in the name of God /Yahweh, and in the name of the people of Israel. It is similar to Captain Cook's claim of behalf of the King of England of all of Australia by a simple landing in Botany Bay in NSW. But there were already people living in the land of Israel, just as there were in Australia. It was not 'terra nullius' there either.

So my first point is that we are to ask questions about how we recognise God's sovereignty over human sovereignties, and how that is enacted. For example, if the Promised Land of Israel was meant to be the place of God's sovereignty, God's Kingdom, then it should be a place where people walk with justice, kindness, and walk humbly with their God. as Micah 6:8 says. And as we just sang in TIS 751, *What does the Lord require of you?*

As I said last week, God's kingdom and sovereignty is visible to all when there is love, compassion, justice, mercy and grace being shared with every person and tribe. And yet today there is a war going on over the Promised Land. There always needs to be peace, justice, kindness, and respect and honour for God, whose Promised land it really is.

Anyway, Moses died there in the land of Moab, (part of today's Jordan) and was buried in an unmarked grave on the side of the valley beside Mt Nebo. Although in the last century Christians did build a steel snake and staff on the top of Mt Nebo to remember Moses. (Photo 2)

But they did give him legend status. At 120 years old when he died, they said, his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated! And because he laid hands on Joshua, the people followed Joshua as their new leader.

Next, Joshua called the people together to mourn Moses' death.

At the funeral for Moses, they had a eulogy, and tributes- a time to remember and share the story of Moses' life, and the best parts of their lives with him. It is not a full account. For example, no one mentions that Moses was a murderer! Instead, the first thing they remember is – that the Lord God, Yahweh, knew Moses face to face. The most important thing they remembered about Moses was his intimate relationship with God.

Only after that did they mention that through him, God performed the most amazing miracles, signs and wonders in Egypt, and through him, God did the most terrifying displays of power, like the plagues. The people's crossing of the Reed (or Red) Sea only happened because Moses was there to be used by God. So Moses' accomplishments were not simply to be measured by what he personally did. His accomplishments were measured by his relationship with God, and what he did for others.

What will people say at your funeral? And how will they judge your life? There are a lot of jokes about dying, funerals and eulogies. We all tend to laugh about difficult subjects, like our own deaths. For example, geologists say that old geologists never die, they just slowly petrify! Or quilters joke that "She who dies with the most fabric, wins!" In each case, there is a sense of incompleteness about it. And so it was for Moses. His work was not complete.

What will people say at your funeral? And how will they judge your life? For Christians, the answer to the question 'What does the Lord require of us, and how will we be judged' are given in our gospel reading from Matthew 22 today. In Jesus' day one of the most hotly debated questions was which commandment in the Torah is the greatest. It was natural that Jesus, a controversial new teacher from a remote village of Galilee, newly arrived in Jerusalem, was asked for his opinion. His answer would be of interest in the dinner conversations of the city's lawyers, Pharisees and priests.

Jesus' immediate answer is quite unremarkable. He affirms the standard answer given by many teachers of his day - the great commandment from the book of Deuteronomy - "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength". But then Jesus goes on and gives two interesting additions, suggestions that were bound to create a buzz around the Jerusalem dinner tables.

He adds a second commandment, from the book of Leviticus, "Love your neighbour as yourself" and said the two commandments belong together and that between them, they summarise everything God ever commanded of his people. As far as we know no one else had ever combined these two commands, love God and love your neighbour, in such a way before.

And then he adds an extra tag end to the first commandment, which was a new concept within the 'loving of God' - to love with "all your heart, soul and strength" Jesus also adds "with all your mind". Again, as far as we know, no-one had ever suggested loving God with 'all our minds' before.

So Jesus sees 'the love of God' as involving our minds, our intellects, our thinking, our reasoning, our sub-conscious, our ego, our deepest thoughts and psyche, as well as our emotions, our souls, our spirits and our will, or personal commitment.

How then do we as Christians go about loving God? for unlike Moses, we cannot see God face to face. It's not easy to love someone who cannot be seen or spoken to or played with in quite the same way as another human being. Yet the principles are the same. The ways in which we grow in love for another person are the same ways we can grow in love for God.

Let me suggest four main ways we grow in love for God:

First, to love someone you need to get to know them, to take the time to learn about them and to be with them. With God, it means using our minds to get to know God, to read and think about how God has related to people in the past, to learn of God's nature, of what God is like. And that means spending time with God, seeking deliberately to be aware of God's presence with us, and being there with God, what's called "contemplation" of God. That's one of the skills encouraged by the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality course I ran during the pandemic at Berwick. Contemplation involved to sit in God's presence each day for 2 minutes in silence, 'contemplating' or thinking deliberately to allow ourselves to be in the very presence of God.

A second way which is an essential means of growing in love for another person, is through communication; developing and expressing a relationship through talking with them and listening to them.⁴ Prayer is the act of deliberate communication with God - saying and listening. Our prayer times need to include plenty of silence - to sense, to hear, God's response.

Thirdly, we grow in love for other people by frequently telling them we love them, by affirming them, praising them, congratulating them, thanking them. Our coming to worship God, regularly, feeds our love of God. The very act of telling God of our love draws us closer to God.

Fourthly, we express our love for other people by trying to please them, by living the way they want us to be, by doing things their way. I would think everyone here who is a husband or wife has changed their behaviour at some stage, in the interests of pleasing their partner - it's part of their love for each other. So it is with God. We frequently speak in church about the way of Christ, and God's call to us to follow that way of love and self-giving service. This is where the essential link between loving God and loving our neighbour comes in. We cannot be loving God if we do not follow God's way of love for our neighbours.

So, we love God through our devotion and prayer and praise, and through our compassion, our service and our generosity to others. But there's one other major factor too, which grows our love of God.

I read a story about a grandfather who spent the evening with his daughter, her husband and family one evening. He said- 'I spent over an hour cuddling my baby grand-daughter. She went to sleep in my arms and it was beautiful. I loved it. I feel for the grandchildren with a depth and strength of love as great as I feel for my children.'

That love communicates to them. Children grow up from day one loving their parents (and hopefully their grandparents too) because their parents love them. A child's trust and dependence in his loving parents naturally results in them learning what it is to love, and to love in return.

And it is the same as it is with God. God loves us. God loves you and me. When we receive that love, in trust, in faith, in dependence on God, when we know God loves us, then the natural result is that we will love God in response. That's how we most come to love God, to follow the great commandment, by receiving God's love for ourselves and then living with the love and joy and peace God's love arouses in us for him and for others. So one day we will all die. One day hopefully someone will be there to stand up for us, and tell our eulogy. May it be that our intimate relationship with God will be the first and most important thing that is said. And may our contributions be measured, not just by our personal achievements, but by what we have done to love others and further God's Kingdom. For we know what God wants of us. 'Love God and love your neighbour, all the law and the prophets hang on these two great commandments'. Amen.

Prayer of Confession - Responsive for each side of the congregation, and led by 3 voices.

LEADER: Jesus calls us to love God with all our hearts..

VOICE 1: All our hearts?

VOICE 2: More than our families and friends, our homes, our jobs, our cars, our computers, our smart phones?

LEADER: More than all of these because when we love God with all our heart, it is that love which influences us and enables us to act lovingly towards not only family and friends - who may be easy to love – but towards others who may not be so easy to love.

VOICE 1: And we realise that people matter more than things.

Forgive us, O God when we fail to put you first in our lives.

LEADER: Jesus calls us to love God with all our soul

VOICE 2: Our whole being?

VOICE 1: More than anyone or anything we invest energy in? Music, sport, art, gardening, - any of our hobbies...?

LEADER: More than all of these because when we love God with all our soul, it is God's dynamic love which directs how we use our energy, our interests, our power. Who we are and what we do can then be used to benefit others as well as ourselves.

Forgive us, O God when we fail to put you first in our lives.

LEADER: Jesus calls us to love God with all our mind.

VOICE 2: Surely not all of our mind.

VOICE 1: More than our thirst for knowledge, our learning in schools and beyond, the books we read, our advances in information technology,?

LEADER: More than all these because when we love God with all our mind, it is God's creative love which then inspires our thoughts and our will so that our wisdom and knowledge are shaped by God's kingdom values of justice and mercy, love and peace.

Forgive us, O God when we fail to put you first in our lives.

LEADER: Jesus calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

VOICE 1: Forgive us, O God, when we go along with society's concentration on selfish needs over against selfless deeds.

VOICE 2: Forgive our self-centredness and enlarge our vision to see all people as neighbours.

All of us loved equally by you.

LEADER: Merciful God, forgive our weaknesses and strengthen us with your Spirit to love you with all our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Help us to know the peace of your forgiving love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Declaration of forgiveness

Hear the good news: God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned. (John 3;17,18a.) In Jesus Christ, therefore, we are forgiven people.

R: Thanks be to God, Amen! ⁵

Hymn during offering: TIS 699 A new commandment

Offering.

L: God of all fruitfulness, may what we offer - money, talents and time - come as an offering of our hearts: loving God, neighbour and ourselves as you have loved us. **Amen.** ⁶

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prayers of the People.

Prepared by Heather Baxter

"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

A thought from Vintage Leunig (published in the Age 28/12/16)

What's the use of this little hand,
What's the use of this little eye,
What's the use of this little mouth
When all the world is broken?

Make a cake with this little hand,
Make a tear with this little eye,
Make a word with this little mouth
When all the world is broken.

Let us pray for this broken world.
Father
Today we pray for your broken world.

We wonder what our little hands can do for your broken world.
Will baking a cake help?
Will making a phone call help?
Will we gift some food to the Little Free Pantry?
Will we plant a tree?

We wonder what our little eye can do for your broken world.
We shed a tear for Israel and Palestine, for Russia and Ukraine
Our tears keep flowing for communities affected by fire, flood and earthquakes.
We grieve for those who have no stable accommodation and live with food insecurity.
Our sadness extends to the brokenness of your beautiful planet.

We wonder what our little mouth can do for your broken world.
Can we call on our government to follow the path of peace?
Can we speak out against racist or gender related stories?
Do we have words of hope to give to those around us who are struggling?

Father

You grieve with us as you see all these situations, large and small, which cause brokenness to the world. We know that as your hands, eyes and mouths in the world it is up to us to act in order that your justice will be extended to all – particularly those who are at the edges of society. This is tough stuff for us to do and it may involve standing in a place that is outside our comfort zone. Yet you have always promised that you will be with us - in the light and the dark, the good and the bad times. Empower us to do small, extraordinary things with our hands, eyes and mouths so that your broken world begins to heal. In Jesus name we pray.

Lord's Prayer. We pray together in the language and traditions of our hearts:

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 640 Kneels at the feet of his friends

Commissioning and Benediction

Go to love and be loved, drawing deeply from the waters of life.

Go to love and be loved, carrying a heart of God's love within.

Go with a heart for God, for neighbours near and far,

and with the blessing of God upon you.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the companionship of the Holy Spirit,

rest with you now and always. **Amen.** ^{vii}

Recessional hymn- TIS 609 Make me a channel of your peace

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: Karen Roberts

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NEWS & NOTICES

¹ Words for Worship 2020 Pent 22, (MediaCom SA.)

² With Love to the World UCA app (Ed. Rev Dr John Squires 2023), New Proclamation commentary 2011.

³ 2014 Photos of Mt Nebo, Pisgah, Jordan, and the Moses monument by Rev Wendy Snook, Roy Snook and Rev David McAndrew.

⁴ Former UCA president Rev Gregor Henderson wrote a foreword for a prayer handbook which the Uniting Church published a few years ago; He wrote: "Life without prayer would be unthinkable. In the presence of something beautiful, like a sunset or a newborn baby, fancy not being able to whisper a word of wonder or admiration or praise. In a moment of loneliness, fancy not being able to turn to the one who is always there, loving and listening. In the experience of joy and delight and fun, fancy not being able to share it with the one who has given us such capability. In the face of opposition or conflict, fancy not being able to call on the one who's been through it all before. In a time of distress or need, fancy not being able to appeal for guidance and strength." G Henderson 2005 story.

⁵ Moira Laidlaw -Liturgies Online

⁶ Rev Arnie Wieranga, in Figtree resources, Gippsland Presbytery 2023 for Oct 29.

^{vii} Rev Arnie Wieranga in Figtree resources, Gippsland Presbytery 2023 for Oct 29.