

# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



12 NOVEMBER 2023

PENTECOST 24



# 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. TODAY you will need a small jug of water and a container into which to pour it.*

## Focusing ...

From the splash of the stone the ripples move out, wider and wider until they touch the edges: all the edges, and some bounce back. Memories entered and trusted can ripple through our lives, to the edges and sometimes back, and in the ebb and flow memory nurtures hope, becomes living water – gifts of a loving and bountiful God. Thank you God!

**Acknowledgement of Country:** 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.

## Joining the scattered community

Here we begin another week, weaving together the fabric of our lives, in all their different textures and colours, their changing forms and flows.

Here we mark the things that have gone before and hope for newness to come.

Here we celebrate each other's place as one thread in the weaving and cherish the moments when the fabric of our lives become whole.

## Focusing for worship

God lives deep down in our lives and calls us to live those lives with and for others. **God is good!** God goes with us into our deep-down fears and loneliness. **And God loves us, and everything that God has made.** God is not afraid of quiet, deep, even dark places. **For darkness and light are all alike to God. God is always there. God is always here!**

So we come to worship this God!

## Song: Together in Song 412

1. **God sends us the Spirit to befriend and help us recreate and guide us, Spirit friend. Spirit who enlivens, sanctifies, enlightens, sets us free, is now our Spirit friend.**  
*Spirit of the Maker, Spirit friend,  
Spirit of our Jesus, Spirit friend,  
Spirit of God's people, Spirit friend*
2. **Darkened roads are clearer, heavy burdens lighter when we're walking with our Spirit friend.**  
**Now we need not fear the powers of the darkness: none can overcome our Spirit friend.**  
*Spirit of the Maker, Spirit friend,  
Spirit of our Jesus, Spirit friend,  
Spirit of God's people, Spirit friend.*
3. **Now we are God's people, bonded by his presence, agents of his purpose, Spirit friend.**

**Lead us forward ever, slipping backward never, to your remade world, our Spirit friend.**

*Spirit of the Father, Spirit friend,  
Spirit of our Jesus, Spirit friend,  
Spirit of God's people, Spirit friend.*

Tom Colvin and the people of Ghana - © Words: 1969, 1997 Hope Publishing Company

## Our prayers of praise and thanks

Thank you, life giving God ... we thank you today and always!

Life-giving, life-renewing, life-sustaining God, we thank and praise you for the gift of yourself to all the children of this blue planet, earth.

Like a caring father you foster and cherish the life of us all, protecting, guiding, sacrificing, providing a creation with enough and abundance for all your children. Thank you, life giving God ... we thank you today and always!

Like a brother you come among us in Jesus of Nazareth, arriving among our deceits and doubts and calling us to step free in trust and really live! Thank you, life giving God ... we thank you today and always!

Like a mother your Spirit is broodingly with us, offering new birth and healthy nurture, and with tough love making us strong. Thank you, life giving God ... we thank you today and always!

Life-giving, life-renewing, life-sustaining, God, we thank and praise you for the gift of yourself to the children of this blue planet, earth. Wonderful is your name forever!

## Confession and Assurance of forgiveness, acceptance, and renewal

We have journeyed into a far country and wasted our gifts and resources ... **Lord, have mercy on us.**

We turn our backs on family and friends, neighbours, and others I need, seeking our own pleasure and satisfaction ... **Christ, have mercy on us.**

We seek from you gifts and interventions for matters entrusted into our own hands, but patiently waiting, you keep on loving us and welcome us home with rejoicing ... **Lord, have mercy on us.**

Silence

God is love. Through Christ God forgives us all that leads into brokenness and away from God's gifts of life. Take hold of this forgiveness and live your lives in the freedom and power of God's Holy Spirit. **Amen**

# Readings from the Scriptures: (Read by Brenda Grootendorst)

The Lord is a light to our feet, a lamp for our path ...

## **A story from the First Testament – Joshua 24.1-3a and 14-25 - The Tribes Renew the Covenant –**

24 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. <sup>3</sup> Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

<sup>14</sup> “Now, therefore, revere the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living, but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, <sup>17</sup> for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went and among all the peoples through whom we passed, <sup>18</sup> and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore, we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

<sup>19</sup> But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. <sup>20</sup> If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” <sup>21</sup> And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the LORD!” <sup>22</sup> Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” <sup>23</sup> He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.” <sup>24</sup> The people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey.” <sup>25</sup> So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

## **A story from the Bible: Good News/Gospel of Matthew 25.1-13 - The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids:**

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ <sup>10</sup> And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Later the other young women came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ <sup>12</sup> But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ <sup>13</sup> Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

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## Song: (TiS) 619 Have faith in God my heart

**A prayer:** Shepherd of your people, turn towards us again and hold us once more. Bring us together, bind us to one another, that your presence may shine through us, and that we may hear your voice, calling us, renewing us, bringing us life. **Amen!**

## A Word for today – A reflection on the world of war and terror in the Middle East – Revd Dr Chris Budden

### Re-reading the story of Palestine and Israel



*This blog comes from the Rev. Dr Chris Budden. It relates to the current explosion of the conflict in Gaza and Israel. Chris is a retired Uniting Church Minister who is actively engaged with First Peoples; amongst other things, he teaches a course on reconciliation at United Theological College in Sydney, Australia. He has a long interest in ways to find peace in Palestine-Israel. His present research interest is the Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia.*

There are, in my opinion, three contributing factors to both poor analysis and inadequate responses to the conflict between Palestine and Israel, and the particular role of Hamas.

Let me be very clear from the beginning. Hamas' actions in Israel were wrong, profoundly and horribly wrong.

**First**, however, the response and analysis has sought to ignore history. There is a pretence that Hamas simply attacked Israel out of the blue in an act of irrationality. They are mad people who must be eliminated, regardless of the cost to the civilian population. Consider the reality:

- In 1917 the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration supporting the establishment in Palestine of a home for Jewish people. The aim was not to protect Jewish people, but to get rid of them out of Britain.
- Prior to World War 2, there were relatively small numbers of Jewish people in Palestine, which was controlled as a British Protectorate.
- At the end of the war, and with the guilt of the near annihilation of the Jewish people in Germany, support was given to finally enact the Balfour Declaration. People entered Palestine, often illegally, and began to push Palestinians off their land.
- By 1948 there was significant occupation. The UN declared that the land should be partitioned, and two states established. Israel was established, but a Palestinian state has never gained proper support. Israel is opposed to such a state, believing it would threaten their security.
- The State of Israel is a settler-colonial state, and has done exactly what such states have done in Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada. That is, they have stolen land, and justified that theft with the claim that the place was largely unoccupied. Where it was, the people did not use the land properly. People can be dispossessed because they are lesser people – it is a racist narrative, that has been imbedded in apartheid.
- Palestinians have been pushed into smaller and smaller enclaves, reducing any chance of a proper state. They have had walls built around them, their movements are controlled. Witnesses say that they live in a virtual prison.
- In the last 10 years, 3500 Palestinians have been killed by the IDF, including large numbers of children.

One of the things we learned from the struggle against apartheid in South Africa was that we should asked those who are oppressed to tell the story of their oppression, and not to ask the oppressors. People should tell their own story, and not have it told by those who continue to harm them.

**Second**, the clear narrative across the world is that some people are of more value than others. The latest deaths in Israel quite rightly bring forth international condemnation. But the deaths of Palestinians rarely cause a protest. And because people are not seen as equal, then it is okay to seek revenge that is completely disproportionate. Many more Palestinians must die to make up for the death of citizens of Israel.

**Third**, the US and its allies like Australia must take some blame for what is happening because we have failed to uphold international law; we have failed to insist that the law applies to Israel. The settlements on Palestinian land are illegal, yet they keep expanding. The state of Palestine has been declared by the UN, but no-one does anything to make it happen. It is illegal to attack civilians, but civilians in Palestine are attacked and killed all the time, and no-one is held accountable. It is illegal to punish civilians for what their military do, which is exactly what Israel is doing, but the US and its allies will not tell them to stop.

Let me say it again, this is not a defence of Hamas. Which, by the way, was supported by Israel for years as a way of dividing the Palestinian opposition.

This is a claim that we will not have peace in the area until people are treated as of equal value, until international law is respected, and until people stop stealing land. The alternative is a never-ending spiral of violence.

The response to this argument is often to label it and me as antisemitic. This is about the actions of the State of Israel. To name the ways a state breaks international laws, and oppresses other people is not antisemitic or aimed at Jewish people at all. I hope opponents will not throw labels that obscure the debate but will actually respond to the arguments I have made.

Chris Budden, 31 October 2023

## Song: (TiS) 648 Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us

### Prayers for others, the world, ourselves – including the lands and peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia (prepared by Dianne 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*

Ever-loving and ever-present God, in every generation you have cared for your children and your mercy is everlasting: Hear the prayers we bring for your world and community.

Loving Lord, we come to you as the land of the stories of our faith is torn apart. We pray for those who live there now, the ordinary people who are forgotten and apparently of no value as leaders allow weapons of destruction to be released that destroy lives, homes and essential services.

We pray for those who have been injured and who have lost those they love and rely on. You are not unfamiliar with suffering in times of war and persecution. Draw close to them and bring them solace in their loss. We ask your presence with those who desperately try to help. Grant them strength, courage and wisdom.

We pray for peace. We may not see a way forward but we trust in you, the creator. Jesus, walk amongst your people in the great divide. We pray that peace would dwell in their hearts, thoughts, and communications. We pray for Palestinian and Israeli leaders that they may not argue over who is right but seek peace.

We pray for our world, your creation that we may care for it. We pray for those affected by fires in Queensland and Western Australia. May we seek to do what is needed to protect the natural environment. May our leaders make

wise decisions in the face of climate change. May we all care for all that we have been given.

We pray for our church in a time of change:

For those who prepare for next weekend's Synod meetings - organisers and attendees. For our presbytery and our churches.

And we pray for our communities:

- for those who are ill, who need care
- for those who provide care
- for those who are hurting, grieving or anxious
- we silently name those we know and care for....

We join in praying the Lord's Prayer as Jesus taught us.

**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.**

Figtree Worship Resources <https://figtreeworshipresource.blog/>

Janet Nelson (Let Us Pray)

Prayer for Israel-Palestine Conflict <https://my.salvos.org.au/toolkit/resource/prayer-for-israel-palestine-conflict-/2870/>

## A time of remembrance for acts of war, terror, and its victims

Jesus looked on the city of Jerusalem and wept.

**And our tears too run down for what is betrayed, for what is lost.**

And the whole creation groaned in labour, waiting for the daughters and sons of God to emerge.

**We grieve for the pain of the world, for the pain of others, and for our own pain.**

**Pray for us, Holy Spirit of God, when we do not know what to pray.**

**SILENCE FOR A SPACE**

***Water – representing our 'tears' - is poured into the font as we remember in silence the cause of those tears ...***

***At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we shall remember them – Lest we forget!***



And yet – we have hope ...



**Affirmation:** It is not true that this world and its inhabitants are doomed to die and be lost;  
**This is true:** *“For God so loved the world that God gave the only son so that everyone who believes in him shall not die but have everlasting life.”*

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death, and destruction;

**This is true:** *“I have come among you not to be served, but to be the servant of all!”*

It is not true that violence and hatred shall have the last word, and that war and destruction have come to stay for ever;

**This is true:** *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, in whom authority will rest, and whose name will be Prince of Peace.”*

It is not true that we are simply the victims of the powers of evil that seek to rule the world;

**This is true:** *“To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo, I am with you always, to the end of the ages.”*

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are prophets of the church, before we can do anything;

**This is true:** *“I will pour out my Spirit on all people, and your daughters and sons shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, and your old folk shall dream dreams.”*

It is not true that our dreams of the liberation of humankind, our dreams of justice, of reconciliation, of human dignity, of peace, are not meant for this earth and its peoples and their history;

**This is true:** *“The hour comes, and it is now, that true worshippers shall worship God in Spirit and in truth.”*

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## Song: (TiS) 470

1. Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days:  
A world without saints forgets how to praise.  
Their faith in acquiring the habits of prayer,  
Their depth of adoring, Lord, help us to share.

2. Some march with events to turn them God's way;  
some need to withdraw, the better to pray;  
some carry the gospel through fire and through flood:  
our world is their parish; their purpose is God.

3. Rejoice in those saints, unpraised and unknown,  
who bear someone's cross, or shoulder their own;  
they shame our complaining, our comforts, our cares:  
what patience in caring, what courage, is theirs!

4. Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days:  
a world without saints forgets how to praise.  
In loving, in living, they prove it is true:  
their way of self-giving, Lord, leads us to you.

*Frederick Pratt Green 1903- ©1973, 1980 Stainer & Bell Ltd*

**The Blessing:** *We remember who we are, and we receive the promise of God's presence with us – always and everywhere.*

God said, "I am the Lord, your God. You shall have no other Gods but me."

**We will worship God alone.**

Jesus said, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

**We will love and serve others in the way of Christ.**

Jesus breathed on the disciples, saying, "Receive my Spirit."

**We call upon the Spirit to fill us anew, so the world may be blessed by the service of this community of God.**

## We sing to one another (TiS) 779 - May the feet of God walk with you.

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ! Amen**

## Postlude

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

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Music: Karen Roberts

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