

# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



19 NOVEMBER 2023

PENTECOST 25



# 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

The baptised people of God gather for worship in a broken world, a world plagued by hunger, addiction, despair, and alienation; divided by political, economic, and racial ideologies; scarred by the Holocaust and other genocides; oppressed by tyrannies; wounded by torture and war. In such a world, Christians gather for worship affirming the wonder and goodness of God's creation and affirming God as creator and sovereign. Come, join in the gathering of all God's people, everywhere!

**Song: Together in Song (TIS) 56** O sing a new song to the Lord

## Prayers of Praise, Thanksgiving:

Sing from the mountain tops and shout to the skies! Praise God all you messengers, and cheer all you servants!

Let the whole of our continent praise the God of all: mountain and desert, river, waterfall, and farmland.

Let the vegetation praise the Creator: gum tree and wattle, grasstree, boronia and lotus lily.

Let all animals praise God: koala and kangaroo, Tasmanian devil, possum, and wombat.

Let the birds of the plains and forest praise their maker: galah and emu, blue wren and kookaburra, honeyeater, and jabiru.

Let coastland and seas praise and sing out: surf and tides, beaches, coral, and rock-pool.

Let everything in the seas offer their praise to God: seal and penguin, starfish and snapper, dolphin, and whale.

Let our cities and towns take time to praise God: park and street, households and garbage trucks, town halls and service centres.

Let all music give sing its praises to God: guitar and organ, orchestra and pop groups, didgeridoo and voices in all languages and cadences.

Let every living thing, all of creations under the sun, everything that is or ever will be, sing praise – with us – to the maker of all things.

*(From Bruce Prewer – Australian Psalms)*

**Confession, and Assurance of Forgiveness:** God our Creator, your kindness has brought us the gift of a new day. Help us to leave yesterday, and not to covet tomorrow, but to accept the uniqueness of today and all it brings.

**Silence for a space**

By your love, celebrated in your Word, seen in your Son, brought near by your Spirit, take from us what we need not carry any longer, so we may be free again to choose to serve you and to be served by each other.

**Silence for a space**

**We believe that God forgives and sets us free. And that at the beginning of the day, we commit ourselves to following where Christ calls and to loving one another. Amen!**

*(The Wee Worship Book – Iona Community)*

## A TIME FOR STORYTELLING AND LISTENING

Your Word O Lord is a lamp for our feet - A light for our path (Read by Robyn Mulder)

**A reading from among the Letters of the New Testament: 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11**

<sup>4</sup> But you, brothers, and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup> for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup> So, then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober, <sup>7</sup> for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

**A reading from the Gospel/Good News named Matthew: 25:14-30 - The Parable of the Talents – (Jesus is speaking)**

<sup>14</sup> “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup> to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once <sup>16</sup> the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup> But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. <sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>22</sup> And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more

talents.’<sup>23</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’<sup>24</sup> Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter,<sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’<sup>26</sup> But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter?’<sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.<sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him and give it to the one with the ten talents.<sup>29</sup> For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.<sup>30</sup> As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

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In this may we hear the Word of God – **Thanks be to God!**

## Song: TIS 573 *A charge to keep I have*

**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 - Revd Dr Tony Floyd

People of faith often have a benign image of God. God is gentle, slow to anger, merciful, ever-loving. But our two readings remind us of another side of God, the wrathful side. Luther called this God’s “alien work.” Sometimes God’s love is shown in frustration and anger when God’s expectations aren’t met.

The gospel story today gives another picture of what some call 'the alien side' of God. Jesus, ever enigmatic, seems to delight in upsetting people’s ideas about what God is like. He tosses unexpected images of God around like theological time bombs. In one of today's other readings **Paul** picks up on one of those images: *God is like a thief in the night*. **Boom!** We didn’t expect that one. In **the parable, Jesus suggests that God is like a harsh, greedy master**. **Boom!** We didn’t see that one coming.

Yet, it is in God’s alien face that we sometimes see God’s true image. Sometimes that image can only be seen in the negative. What appears as shadow and darkness in the negative is really light and brilliance in the positive image. In this parable - another one about what the reign of God, the Kingdom of heaven is like - we see a master angry when the slave wastes an opportunity to make something of his single talent. The positive side of this image begins the story at another place, the initiative of the master in which he entrusts the slave with something precious and expects that it will be well used. If nothing were at stake, the master would not be upset. But something great is at stake. For reasons not made known in the parable, it is clear that the master relies upon the slave and that even his single talent is crucial to the master’s estate.

This is like the kingdom of God, the realm of heaven Jesus says. To each, something is given, whether small or great. But each is trusted, and each is needed.

The parable speaks of a situation filled with potential. The master is master of slaves - not employees, not friends doing him a favour, not relatives working in the family business- **SLAVES!** They own nothing! They have no rights! They earn no wages!

Suddenly, without any warning, without any suggestion that they have done something special to earn or keep any level of trust at all, the master **gives to each slave** a certain amount

of talents, or cash, as we would say. Each slave has the potential to invest, to capitalise, and to earn both interest and the master's good pleasure. Each slave has the possibility of serving so as to hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

**But** one does not fulfil his potential. He has only been given a single portion of talent. He doesn't think he is capable of investing even that. He is afraid. He hides the talent (the equivalent of 5 years wages for a labourer) and returns it unharmed, but undeveloped. Fear robbed him of his potential. But what would you do if someone simply trusted you with that out of the blue? Biblical scholar Eduard Schweizer says that the Jewish law of the day said: "*Whoever immediately buries property entrusted to him is no longer liable because he has taken the safest course conceivable.*" (*The Good News According to Matthew* p 471). This one talent slave followed the letter of the law. He acted responsibly. Why then was the master unimpressed?

Let me remind us that in Matthew's gathering of stories about Jesus' life and ministry, this story is told towards the end of his Good News/Gospel. Jesus has already entered Jerusalem to the praise and acclamation of the general populace. In a couple of chapters this story will end at the cross. On the way to that cross Jesus tells this story about a master who called his slave servants together and gave into their keeping all his precious possessions - everything he had. Jesus is on the way to Calvary to give away everything he has - his whole life!

That is a very significant context or setting. An extremely sobering interaction of story and event.

Look at us here this morning. We are just ordinary folk, and yet this parable says that something extraordinary has been done to us. Jesus has given us the kingdom. So now there is an accounting, a judgment, and a question - *What have you done with what I have given you?*

It is as unbelievable as a good story and as believable as a good story; as simple as a good story and as complex as the layers of meaning in a good story - AT THE SAME TIME!

**Listen** ... for what God may be saying to you, to me, to all the uncertain and outcast who are gathered into the brokenness and self-emptying of the Christ and by God's choosing taken and used as exactly those required for the revealing in God's intentions/commonwealth for all of creation.

**This gift came via a friend of mine on Facebook this past week ... listen ... enter ... be nourished rather than alarmed or discouraged with what is entrusted to us**

[https://www.facebook.com/watch/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS\\_GKoT-GK1C&v=3644715345787519](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GKoT-GK1C&v=3644715345787519)

## A TIME FOR RESPONDING

**Song: TIS 159 God whose farm is all creation**

*(During singing our Offerings of ourselves, our money, and our gifts)*

## Notices/Announcements

**Prayers of the People:** Including the leaders and the people of Timor Leste (East Timor), Indonesia, and the Philippines ... (Prepared 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*

In our prayers of the people today (adapted from prayers by Janet Nelson), to the prompt "Giver of every gift we have", please respond "We give you thanks and praise".

Giver of every gift we have,

**We give you thanks and praise.**

**Let us pray:**

God our Creator, you entrust us with gifts to use in your service and the service of your people; hear our prayers for the world and for the church.

We pray for your world:

for the destitute, the homeless, the dispossessed and the refugees; for those facing the loss of their homes and their livelihoods due to the threats posed by climate change; for those who risk their freedom to draw attention to injustice; for all who live in places of war or oppression. We think especially of the people of Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, and the peoples of the Pacific islands.

We give you thanks for those you have gifted with wisdom; those with a passion for justice; for whistleblowers, peacemakers and environmentalists; for writers and artists; and for all who bring closer your reign of justice and peace. Help us to use our talents in your service.

Giver of every gift we have,

**We give you thanks and praise.**

We pray for your church:

For the newly baptised and confirmed; for all teachers of the faith, pastors and ministers; for your church witnessing to your love in places of need, persecution and indifference.

We give you thanks for those you have equipped for leadership: for able administrators and compassionate pastors; for prophets and poets, embroiderers and musicians; and for all who, through word or action, make known your love and grace. Help us to use our talents in your service.

Giver of every gift we have,

**We give you thanks and praise.**

We pray for our community:

For our families, our friends, our neighbours and ourselves; for the unemployed, the marginalised and all whose gifts are not valued; for our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and for those who have come to this land from other countries and who have enriched us by sharing their culture.

We give you thanks for those you have blessed with the gift of friendship and hospitality; for those who nurture the young and care for the old; for those who work to promote social inclusion and reconciliation. Help us to use our talents in your service.

Giver of every gift we have,

**We give you thanks and praise.**

We pray for all who are in particular need at this time:

For the fearful and those lacking hope; for those who see no value or purpose in their lives; for the sad and the lonely, those experiencing sickness of body or mind, the dying and the grieving. We think today especially of the families of the four young Samoan farm workers killed near Mansfield, as they grieve from a distance and struggle with the process of bringing the bodies home to Samoa for burial.

We give you thanks for those with gifts of healing; for doctors, nurses and skilled counsellors; for steadfast companions; for those who are blessed with courage and perseverance, humour and selflessness; for all who work to foster healing and wholeness. Help us to use our talents in your service.

Giver of every gift we have,

**We give you thanks and praise.**

Lord, you provide for all our needs, even though we sometimes fail to see this. Help us to recognise within ourselves the gifts you have provided and to be open to your calling in our lives.

We pray in the name of your son Jesus, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**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 and 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**

## Final Song: TIS 106 *Now thank we all our God*

**The Blessing/Berkat:** We remember who we are, and we receive the promise of God's presence with us whatever we do and wherever we go.

## All respond by singing a blessing to one another: (TIS 779)

May the feet of God walk with you, and his hand hold you tight.

May the eye of God rest on you, and his ear hear your cry.

May the smile of God be for you, and his breath give you life.

May the Child of God grow in you, and his love bring you home.

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**We put out the Christ light (candle) remembering**  
**that Christ goes with us and meets us in the world.**

## Thoughts for reflection in the week to come - Listening and learning

*Recall a time or a situation when you were expected to participate in something or commit to something that you did not fully understand. What was it like, and how included did you feel?*

*Did something happen that allowed you understanding and freedom to participate fully from your heart? What turned the thirsty land of your isolation/separation into the living water of fuller understanding and participation?*

**Prayer:** *When language barriers are like thick fog shrouding faith's landmarks, blurring into vagueness the clear voice and sounds we seek, speak in us, Lord.*

*Through the swirling veil teach us how much we can share with simple words, patient listening, smiling companionship, with such small efforts for such immeasurable rewards.*

*But God who comes in the sound of sheer silence (1 Kings 19.12), do not let that coming lull us into avoiding the costs of truly speaking heart to heart with another: words, songs, documents, conversation 'in language' – each other's language and not simply our own.*

(Revd Dr Tony Floyd in "Living Water – Thirsty Land", in *the UCA Assembly Mission Prayer Handbook 2009*)

## Postlude

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

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Music: Peter Hurley

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## NEWS & NOTICES