

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



26 NOVEMBER 2023

CHRIST THE KING



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 145 The King of love my shepherd is vs 1

Acknowledgement of First Peoples. By Bible Reader Dianne R.

Welcome

Call to worship.

L: We have come to worship;

P: We have come in the name of Christ the King.

The joy of the Lord Jesus be with you all!

And also with you!

Today ends the Christian year which began in Advent last December. We end it not with a whimper but a bang! We celebrate our faith in Christ Jesus, with a great tidal wave of praise which began at dawn in islands of the Pacific, has reached us, and will sweep around the planet.

We are a small part of that wave.

Let us rejoice in the paradoxical glory of Christ, our only true King, in whom there is no shadow or darkness, **but a light wherein the humble and poor may walk secure forever and ever!**¹

Prayer

L: Most holy Friend, by your Spirit encouraging us, and the grace of Christ enabling us, may we worship you with the enthusiasm born of true love. We join our voices with the millions who this day praise the name of Jesus from every nation on earth, and with the great host of heavenly souls whose praise and love fills the universe and flows far beyond all time and space. Glory be to you forever!. Through Christ our King.²

Hymn TIS 216 (tune Darwall TIS 371) Rejoice the Lord is king vs 1, 3, 5.

Prayer of Confession

L: Loving God draws near to every open and prayerful heart.

All who confess their sin receive forgiveness and are transformed by God's Spirit.

Let us pray.

Holy friend of those who are poor:

you came to us in a small and vulnerable state,
dependent upon others for your survival.

The arms of many loved ones held you.

The hands of many provided for your needs.

Through these acts of love the Spirit of Christ was revealed
and this is no less true for us today.

Yet we confess we are uncomfortable with weakness and poverty.

We flee such places in ourselves and others
and seek instead power and security.

Have mercy on us and reveal your Spirit once again
in infants and children, in those who are mentally ill
and those who struggle with addictions,
among those who are poor and those in prison,
in the unlovely and shame-filled places within us.

(silent prayer)

Forgive our limited vision and enable us to discover
your holy presence in and through all. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

We have received mercy. We are made new.

Thanks be to God.

Through the incarnation, God has befriended every part of life –
our joys and our sufferings, our strengths and our weaknesses,
our places of light and our places of shadow.

God's love is revealed through and through.

Thanks be to God, Amen!³

Pass the Peace

First Word.

Gospel Reading: **Matthew 25:31-46** (Read by Dianne R)

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Sermon - The Reign of Christ

Like it or not, judgment is a fact of life. And it is very obvious to any young person like my niece Genevieve, who has just sat her VCE examinations. She and other young people will be judged about how well they have learned their VCE subject material. No matter how much a last -minute cramming student might beg that the exam date to be changed, the VCE exam dates do not shift. Judgment Day will come! Although there can be occasions involving a serious illness or accident where a student might get a second chance at the exam. But slackness at

studying, or not doing the class assignments are no excuse. One day in January the news of VCE 'judgement' will come to the students with those dreaded ATAR numbers.

So the experience of Judgement is a reality of our lives. If we break Australian or Victorian laws, then society and the courts will judge us. If we live immorally and stupidly -- drink too much, engage in a drug-filled lifestyle, live a life of constant stress -- then our bodies themselves will judge us. We simply cannot escape judgment in life.

I saw with interest that today's Bible study at Ormond UCA from the Advent series, "What Are We Waiting For?", is meeting in the Church today from 4.00 – 5.30 p.m. And today, facilitated by Brad Denniston, the group will be exploring the question - Waiting for the End? - Jesus and the Future. So, maybe the question is – Is the Final Judgement Day coming in our own futures? What will it be like? Come and discuss it further this afternoon!

Jesus rarely spoke about the Final Judgment, (which was a common belief in his time), which is the time when all humanity will be judged. However, on one occasion he did paint a picture for us in one of his stories, which we call the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. In this story, there is a scene depicting the Son of Man, the Messiah, seated on the throne of glory, surrounded by all the angels. And in front of him, all the people of the nations will be gathered for judgement. But the Son of Man is not described here as an arbitrary tyrannical King. Instead, the Son of Man is likened to a shepherd with a mixed flock of sheep and goats.

Now in Australia we don't usually mix up our sheep and goats. And we usually have hundreds or even thousands of them on our farms. (See Merino photos). But in the Middle East, even today, it is different. Here is a photo (on screen) of a mixed flock of sheep and goats. First, can you pick which are sheep and which are goats? When I was in Jordan, I couldn't pick the difference from the bus window. They are all dirty, floppy eared, with long scruffy hair or wool, and some are multi-coloured. They look nothing like a proud Merino Sheep!

Secondly, look at the size of the mob of animals. There are maybe only 20 or 30 animals! It is tiny, from our Australian perspective. A shepherd could know each animal by name. And thirdly, I wasn't able to get a good photo of this, but I saw the flock being moved from one area to another. And you know what? The young shepherd boy rode a donkey up in front of the flock, and all the animals (all 20 or 30 of them) followed him across the road and into the next grassy pasture! And I didn't see a single sheep dog! Middle Eastern farming is very different to ours. So remember that as we listen to what happens next.

The shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, said Jesus. So he says there shall be a division on the final day of our human history, the day of the blow of the trumpet, the day of the great judgement. Now the scene is of the Son of Man like a magistrate, a king or a judge, sitting on his throne, the sheep to the right, and the goats to the left.

You know the verdict. You know the judgement criteria:

'I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was a stranger, I was naked, I was sick, I was in prison!

"Lord, when did we meet you?" "Lord, when did we not meet you?"

It is an awesome, overwhelming, even terrible scene. The Judgement Day has come, and our scorecards, like VCE marks, will be issued to us all. Those sheep with good scores on the right hand of the Messiah will be allowed joyful entrance into God's kingdom, while those goats on the left with poor scores will be denied it, instead to face the curse of the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

And the great surprise is that the individuals didn't see their scores coming! Some people thought they would get good score cards, and didn't, while others thought they might have failed, but instead passed! How confusing! How concerning!

The promise of fire and brimstone for sinners on the Judgement Day as our end if we did not repent was a popular sermon theme 100 years ago. There's a story that one 'fire and brimstone' preacher loved preaching on this passage in Matthew 25, and he used to terrify his listeners with pictures of the utter blackness, depravity and condemnation of hell that the goats were going to experience. With great enjoyment, he would regale them with graphic illustrations of the weeping and wailing and the gnashing of teeth of the lazy and the evil doers of the world.

One day, when he was in mid flight on his favourite topic, an old gummy woman got up from the church of the church and gleefully shouted, "Them that has 'em can gnash them!" And without a pause, the preacher fixed her with a stern and baleful eye, and said, "Madam, teeth will be provided!"

Humour aside, there is no avoiding the implication that judgement awaits all of us, and to miss out on entering God's Kingdom would be more than just a tragedy. It would be an eternal disaster. An eternal disaster, with no comeback or re-marking of our exam papers.

So let us be clear about what we will not be judged on. No one will be condemned for not being a millionaire. Sorry, Eddie McGuire, from "Who wants to be a millionaire?" the TV show. No one will be condemned for not being very talented. Sorry, 'X factor' and 'the Voice'. No one will be condemned for not having a showplace house, or clean bathrooms or beautiful gardens. Sorry, "Better Homes and Gardens".

It is clear that our charity to the needy, or our lack of charity, is very, very important to God. Helping with people's hunger, thirst, homelessness, nakedness, sickness, imprisonment and loneliness are absolutely essential for any disciple of Jesus. And that is why our congregations do what they do. I am delighted when I see Ormond UCA's Little Pantry being used, and see community people also donating to the pantry as well. It is a real blessing for those in need.

I also read in the recent Pathfinder magazine about the Refugees and Asylum seekers who access food from the food banks at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) and the Brigidine Sisters in Port Melbourne. I read "Both organisations describe the pressure caused by the rise in cost of living which impacts us all, but for refugees and people seeking asylum with no safety net, it is causing unimaginable stress and despair." And so Ormond UCA folks are being asked to contribute goods or money to assist those in need. Good on you! 😊 Charity is really important, and we should do it, and God is pleased that we do.

But charity or handouts are not enough to solve the world's problems of poverty and evil. Even if all of us were as charitable and hard working as Mother Teresa of Calcutta, we still wouldn't be able to change the whole world enough by giving charity. It is good, but it is not enough. We need hand-ups as well as handouts. Social justice as well as social welfare. Often people don't see the connection between these two.

So let me tell you a story, a parable if you like. One day, a woman noticed a baby floating downstream in a river. She was very concerned, and waded out and rescued the baby. She loved and cared for it very well. But the next day, there were two more babies spotted floating down the river, and someone else was needed to look after them. Then on the third day, there were three more babies, and the same thing happened. Until after a month or two, a whole village was built up on the side of the river, rescuing babies, and then feeding, clothing, cleaning and caring for them. People started to get organised, and mass-produced baby clothes and went to Foodbank to get more food. But the burden grew greater and greater, as even more babies kept floating down the river to them. And the caring people became desperate, as they ran out of helpers, money, and time to rescue more babies.

And then, eventually one person got up from the nappy washing, and said, "Let's go up stream, and find out who is throwing the babies into the water, and stop them doing it! And then we won't have to rescue babies anymore!" And all the people cheered, and they did exactly that.

So, caring for the babies is charity and social welfare and it is good. But we also need to go upstream and stop whoever it is from throwing the babies into the river in the first place. And that is social justice. We need to work with other caring people to stop babies getting thrown into rivers, or people into slavery or into child prostitution, and so on. We need to stand against abuse of our young people. We need to speak out for asylum seekers and refugees, when they can't speak up for themselves. Remember that Jesus was a refugee himself as a child? And the list goes on.

Whenever we succeed in stopping wars, and unjust laws, or are able to cause change in the behaviours of governments and organisations, businesses and structures, then there is less need for the charities to exist! Because there are less traumatised people, and it is a better place for us all. So social justice as well as social welfare is essential for Christian disciples.

Archbishop Oscar Romero once said, “There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried.” Empathy and the shared experience of suffering can create a bridge between otherwise disparate people. Crossing this bridge often leads to a mysterious encounter with the Spirit of Christ. When we respond to suffering with practical acts of love – a cup of water or a warm meal – not only is God’s love made real but Christ himself appears. This gospel truth is the lens through which we celebrate the Reign of Christ Sunday. We are invited to open ourselves to the possibility of experiencing the reign of Christ here and now, whenever we respond to those in need with open and generous hearts. How might this encourage our participation in the prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done?”⁴

Let us reflect as we sing.

Hymn TIS 629 When I needed a neighbour vs 1,2, and 7.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

L: You in whom our dreams for a renewed world are possible:

holy desire rises in our hearts and we follow it up and out.

We connect with the world around us and discover you in and through all.

In places of colour and beauty

your Spirit reigns.

In cooling shade and the dark of night

your Spirit reigns.

When we feel confident and know achievement

your Spirit reigns.

When we are vulnerable and feel weak

your Spirit reigns.

We give thanks for your enduring presence

and pray to be spirit-filled people –

happy participants in your realm of love. Amen.⁵

Offering.

L: Blessed be God, treasury of blessing.

R: May we praise you, giver of truth and goodness, with all we have and are. Amen.⁶

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prayers of the People. (Prepared by Heather B)

"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

From Mary Coloe in “Sundays Under the Southern Cross” we read

“At the dawn of this twenty-first century our struggles are different to the community we read about in the New Testament: climate change, terrorism, global economic rationalism and its consequences, continuing wars, drought, genocide, and the personal daily struggles in families, relationships, work. While our world is vastly different, we still need to hear the good news that God is with us.

We pray to this God, a God who is closer to us than the air we breathe.

Let us pray.

God, King of the universe, Shepherd King of your wandering flock of diverse peoples - we watch with horror at the TV news.

We pray for the peoples of Israel and Gaza, of Russia and Ukraine. The destruction of places and homes, communities and livelihoods, and families is beyond our belief. Help us to remain vigilant in praying for peaceful, just outcomes for these areas. And remind us that our own hearts need to be peace-filled in our dealings with our neighbours.

We pray for the growing number of people in Australia who have no secure housing. For those who use their car as their home or move from one acquaintance's couch to the next on rotation, or sleep on the street during the day in order to be alert to the dangers of the night. We pray for bi-partisan political will and energy in order to address this challenge in such a wealthy nation as Australia. We pray that we will be empowered to be part of the movement for change by speaking to our politicians about security of housing, and voting for politicians who promise to act for just outcomes in housing.

We pray for the environment – waterfalls, shady forests, deep seas, microscopic insects, spectacular flowering plants, clear winds and our precious star - the sun. Give us a renewed purpose to work for the good of your beautiful creation. When we are discouraged and feel that we are not able to change much – that larger actions beyond us are needed – remind us that the small actions of many people do make a difference.

God, King of the universe, Shepherd King of all the peoples of the world

You love all people.

You love each one of us.

We pray in silence for those known to us who need your blessing.

In Jesus name we pray.

Amen

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 228 Crown him with many crowns vs 1, 3, 6.

Commissioning and Benediction.

Christ the feet-washer and the friend of sinners is your only King;
therefore no menial service for others is beneath your dignity
and no individual is beyond your concern and respect.

You cannot be a mini-Christ to everyone in trouble of some sort
but you can be Christ's agent for someone.

Therefore I charge you in the name of Christ to keep your eyes and hearts open,
and you will recognise those in whom Christ comes to you for mercy.

The grace of Christ Jesus ever redeem you,

the love of God ever enfold you,

the fellowship of the Spirit ever inspire you;

now and evermore! **Amen.**^{vii}

Recessional hymn- TIS 276 There's a light upon the mountains vs 1, 2, 3, 4.

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

¹ Moira Laidlaw Liturgies Online

² Words for Worship 2020, MediaCom SA

³ Words for Worship 2014, MediaCom SA

⁴ Donders, Brett Blair, WLTTW 2014, Preaching the Revised Common Commentary (Ed. Soards, Doseman, McCabe). Words for Worship 2011 Mediacom SA.

⁵ Words for Worship 2014, MediaCom SA

⁶ Christmas Bowl Christ the King resources 2011

^{vii} Words for Worship 2020, MediaCom SA