

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



07 JULY 2024

PENTECOST 7

Who does he think he is!! Cut him Down



VS.



Jesus as transformative love...

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.

“The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”

“And also with you”

GREETING:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all

And also with you

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to worship at home this week. This week we think about the saying that ‘a prophet has no honour in his home-town.’ I wonder whether this sort of occurrence has been a part of your life. It was for Jesus. Question is : how did he handle it?

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Jesus was rejected
by his friends,
by his family,
by his hometown.

But Jesus created trust
for his disciples,
for the community,
for the world.

In the midst of rejection, let us build acceptance:
for our children,
for our community,
for ourselves.

Come, let us worship God.

HYMN TIS 52: “Let us sing”

PRAYERS OF ADORATION / CONFESSION /

FORGIVENESS & AFFIRMATION OF FORGIVENESS:

Let us Pray
The rumbling of thunder in the distance,
the shade of a gum tree in the back yard,
the laughter of children splashing in the pool,

the stars glittering on a moonless night:
all the gifts of the universe
fill us with delight in every moment.
Great is your imagination,
Creation's Joy!

Broken,
you touch us to make us whole;
tear-stained,
you share our pain and struggles;
gifter of peace,
you replace our bitterness with hope;
teacher of gentle words,
you transform our unbelief into service.
Great is your love,
Christ, Companion of all people!

Making hardened hearts
as soft as a baby's breath;
turning stiffened necks
so we can see the poor;
placing wandering feet
back on the path of discipleship.
Great is your compassion,
Spirit of grace.

God in Community, Holy in One,
we lift our prayers to you this afternoon
in praise and wonder. Amen.

CALL TO RECONCILIATION

When we look at the relationships we hope to have with one another, and with God, we must admit how broken we are. But, as we gather in the presence of God, we are promised forgiveness and healing, if we will confess our sins. Please join me, as we pray to the One who never ceases to love us,

UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

You know how stubborn we can be, Holy God. You call us to serve others, and we stay in the coolness of our own homes. You would send us to where the hopeless live, but we are reluctant to leave the comfort of our complacency. You would feed us on the peace and joy of your word, but we pull our chairs up to the tables of those who serve false promises.

Forgive us, Guiding God. Transform our defiance into discipleship, and our rejection of others into the resurrection of welcoming all people as sisters and brothers in Christ. Help us to love as faithfully as you have always loved us, and send us forth to take the good news of Jesus Christ to everyone we meet.

Silence is kept

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

We open our lips and confess our hearts. God hears our words and make us new, sending us out to bring hope and joy to all the world.

We hear the good news, we believe the good news, we will live out the good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!

Tom Schuman

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: Read by Heather Baxter

Your Word O Lord is a lamp to our feet
and a light to our path

2 SAMUEL 5:1-5, 9-10

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. ²For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." ³So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. ⁵At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. ⁹David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inwards. ¹⁰And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

MARK 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

SERMON: Jesus will transform us – our choice!

When I was training for ministry in Victoria I travelled back home to SA regularly. But as time moved on and lives changed, I found a curious thing happening. I felt I was being squeezed out. It was like my place in a queue was vanishing. I did not have a place. It felt quite strange that the place I grew up in, my home, felt less and less like home and I felt more and more excluded from the life I once knew and valued there.

So, I can understand why the hometown party turned sour for Jesus? Why did his childhood friends, neighbours and family refuse to accept him and his message?

In fact, we might well have imagined that things would go well. You know, hometown boy returns as hero and is received with joy and affirmation by those who knew him well. And, initially he was. The people of Nazareth, who had known Jesus as a young man were surprised, astonished by his wisdom and power. But quickly their surprise turned to offense. "Isn't this (just) the carpenter? Isn't this (just) Mary's son? And they took offense at him." ("What an upstart!")

Have a think about this as a general principle. Not just in Jesus' time but also in today's world. How often is it that someone who we have known well, who 'makes good', gets laughed at – even laughed out of town – their own town - because we judge them according to how we knew them in the school yard, or how we knew them as friends who we grew up with; or because they got into some sort of mischief or another, or smoked a bit of pot, or got in with the wrong crowd back then etc. In Australia we call this the tall poppy syndrome. A Tall poppy that needs to be cut down to size, and not get 'above itself!'

Think about how it was for Jesus. He was one of them, at least, he had recently been one of them. But therein, in fact, may lie the problem, that one who had so recently been just one of them should suddenly now apparently be so far 'above' them. Did they feel slighted?

'Who does he think he is!?!'

Were his words and demeanor now proving hard on their pride?

Perhaps the matter at hand is deeper than this all-too-human tendency to envy another or to feel slighted by the success of someone whom we knew, or thought we really knew, back then!

Maybe it's about resentment at what they have become.

You know, at least sometimes, we 'rusted on' Christians are the very ones who are blinded to God's presence, indifferent to God's power. So, when God comes 'home' and into our lives in a new or different form and offers us faithful transformation – what do we make of him?

The great American theologian/writer Frederick Buechner writes in his autobiography, "Now and Then," of his encounter with an Agnes Sanford, a Christian healer he met. He says:

"The most vivid image she presented, was of Jesus standing in church services all over Christendom with his hands tied behind his back, unable to do any mighty works because the ministers who led the services either didn't expect Jesus to do them or didn't dare ask him to do them."

That's quite an image: Jesus standing in the church, his hands tied behind his back. Then Buechner added this:

"I recognized immediately my own kinship with those ministers."

Is it possible that we in the church, Jesus' latter-day hometown crowd, are sometimes the least likely to call upon him, the last to turn to him, less likely than many others to be open to his power and promise, his mystery and his transformative loving grace?

Specifically, it poses the question for us at OUC: Are we just content to jog along as we always have? And in fact, resist the winds of the Spirit, the winds of change, the winds of transformation as they begin to sweep over us? Are we to remain the hometown crowd who are impressed with the words of Jesus on Sundays, only to retreat into our old secure and comfortable ways of church– as it has been, is now and always will be!?

TOO HARSH!?

Well, we are on a journey to a new church building (the construction has begun, the temporary fencing is up, the demolition that is needed is in progress, excavators are digging, flooring is being installed etc etc etc) and within that building process, Jesus is visiting his hometown mob in Ormond Uniting, and asking us to reveal God's gracious love for the world through our lives and in our new life in that new space.

So, the question is: Are we just going to be the skeptical hometown crowd who hang on to what we have and what we know and what we want, and 'poo-hoo' any supposed call by God to Mission, as the all too familiar rantings of the out of touch preacher!?

OR

Like the disciples of Jesus in the second half of our gospel reading today, are we going to be a congregation of the Risen Christ who answer his call to venture forth on his Mission in and for God's world!?

When Jesus was rejected in his hometown Nazareth, he must have felt deeply hurt but, in turn, he did not reject his own folk! He did not take offense.

He was sad. He sadly shook his head and moved on. Sending his disciples out, two by two, to preach, to heal and to teach. He said something interesting to them: they were to travel light, to "take nothing for the journey" but the clothes on their backs.

In these times of change and challenge for the church or in times of challenge in our personal lives, God may be telling us, for example, to "lighten our load." Maybe Jesus is telling us, to leave behind those big, bulky suitcases stuffed full of "pride" and "ego" and "tradition." Maybe God is asking us to surrender some truly heavy stuff-like the old conflicts we've been bearing for years or the grudges we've been nursing? God is using this time of challenge and change to strip these things from us so that we might travel light again, relying upon God's power alone to guide us and trusting God's grace to uphold us. What a transformation that would be in our lives and that of the congregation!

Jesus Christ is here, now - in our hometown, in our church here, now, and offers us great opportunities at Ormond, in our community, HERE while we are worshipping in the Church of Christ building, AND also, in the new development when we move in next year.

Will we receive him, be open to his transformative power and take up the challenges his mission offers?

It will challenge us.

Let me finish with some words I have adapted slightly from a very positive sermon by Bruce Prewer on this text

'Each of us is not only more than what our parents see in us, or our brothers and sisters, or our friends and neighbours, or the folk within this congregation. We are even much more than we recognise in ourselves.

We are something very special, on a journey with Christ where things do become transformed. Please do not underestimate your potential or down-play your small successes. Give thanks for the mini achievements. And if you have a few major ones, rejoice but don't brag, and stay patient with those others who may be moving much slower.

This transformation does not all happen in a flash. It is an ongoing process. For most of us it is not a smooth climb upwards. Often it is 2 steps forward and then 1 slip backwards or sideways. In our own eyes, the progress can feel frustratingly slow. Yet all the while it is a journey planned by the love of God, initiated by the grace of Christ, and nurtured by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The sky is the limit!

And to the one who alone is our Mission, Jesus Christ, be all praise, now and always.
Amen.

HYMN TIS 180: “God of many names”

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: Prepared by David Northwood

Light the candle to remember those who are not at worship with us today

Our prayer this morning is based on one published by the European Christian Environmental Network. They are a group whose principal aim is to express its Christianity through the support of environmental issues.

The prayer has the theme of living life fully, whilst at the same time preserving the environment for others.

Let us pray. This is our pray others and for ourselves

Since there will be a last time when I will feel the warm spring rain and the cold winter wind on my face,
a last time when I will smell the perfume of the jacaranda,
a last time when I can embrace my lover,
a last time for all that makes life and everything that lives so precious.

Since there will be a last time,
when I listen to the beautiful Karelia suite
let me live daily life with open senses,
clear thinking and a careful presence.

Since there will be a last time,
let me be aware that I am woven into the eternal becoming and being of life,
in which God holds everyone and everything in his and her hands.

Since there will be a last time,
I would like the beauty and preciousness of life which is given to me
to be preserved for those who will live after me.

Take these prayers of ours,
these prayers of fragile humanity
and make them into a peace which overcomes adversity.

For these are the fragile bonds we make and break with human abandon

And before my body dies
I pray that the river I was born to
May again wash over me

By God's touch I pray

That I may move from this consecrated earth
Into the next season

A dark season
Beyond the dying religions that seduce us

Where my soul will surrender
And give in to grace.

Amen

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.**

HYMN TIS 665: "Jesus Christ is waiting"

DISMISSAL:

We will go to let the Joy of creation lead us into this new day.
We will sing glad choruses of hope to a world in despair.
We go to walk with our Heart's Love beside those whose hearts are broken.
**We will touch boastful tongues with peace,
we will offer compassion to those frozen with fear.**
We will go with your gentle wisdom, Spirit of grace,
to walk the streets of the kingdom.
**We will bring healing to grudges held far too long,
filling those who grieve with the laughter of hope.**

(c) Thom M. Shuman

BLESSING:

Beloved, go from this place blessed with divine contentment in the deep and beautiful knowledge that in all things, the power and love of the crucified and resurrected Christ dwells in you. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2024.

WORD OF MISSION:

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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Presider: Rev Ron Townsend

Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES