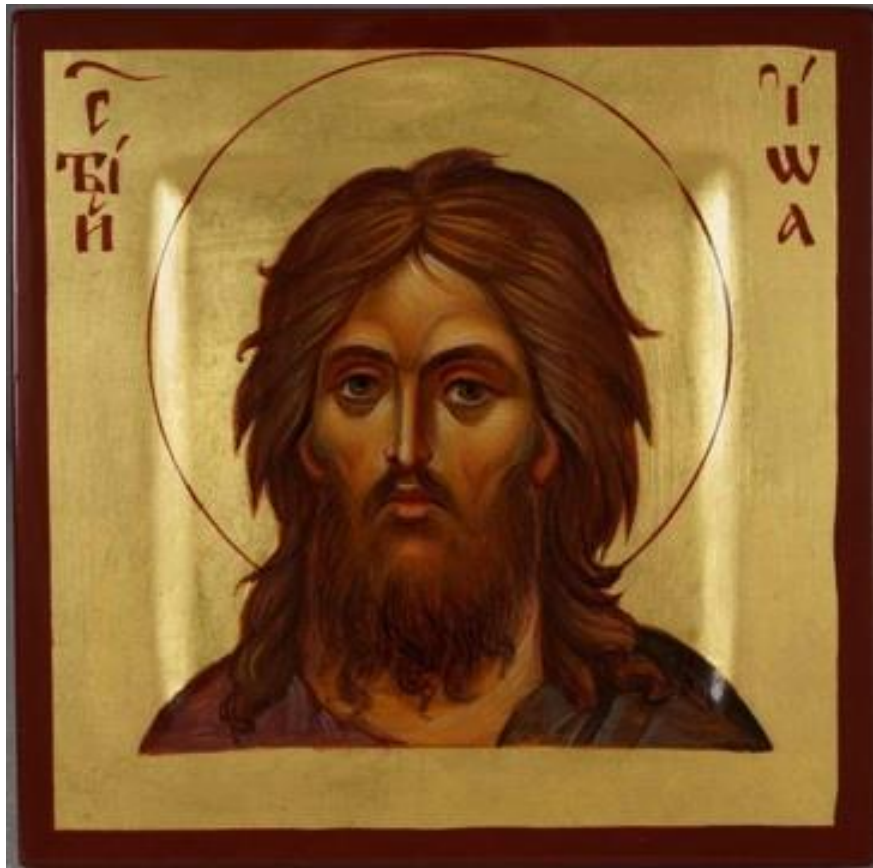


# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



14 JULY 2024

PENTECOST 8



# 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”**

**Focussing ...** As we pause to contemplate this season after Pentecost – the growth and dispersion of the Christian communities, we consider the stories which highlight the God who calls out and accompanies on journeys towards unseen and undreamt places and peoples. We hear of and are invited to name our own experiences of the generous grace and mercy given for the whole creation, the richness of life unearned and undeserved. In the quietness and stillness of this time, be grateful to the loving creator/parent, who faithfully travels with us through the storms of our lives, especially when we feel alone, confused and despair.

**Acknowledgement of Country** – In this NAIDOC Week, and as our National Assembly meets and we celebrate 30 years of the Covenant between the UCAS and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress ... let us join in the acknowledgement in the preamble of the Constitution of the UCA:

**‘We Recognise That’: “First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God’s ways.**

**We give thanks for the Creator’s gifts of lands and peoples, of story and song, and recommit ourselves to God’s intended reconciliation of all peoples and all creation.”**

*(3 Paragraph 3 of the Preamble to the UCA Constitution)*

## Joining the scattered community

Here we begin another week, following the theme of the national Assembly and 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 look forward in 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.

## Call to Worship

The creation is God’s, and all that is in it - **Our world is God’s, and all who live on it!**

Who will come into God’s presence? **We have been called as God’s children, we come!**

Who will worship God in this holy place? **Called by God and strengthened by the Spirit, we come!**

# Song: Together in Song (TIS) 136 There's a wideness in God's mercy

## Sharing of joys and concerns for prayer

Creator of the ends of the earth, everlasting God, you speak our world into being with your Wisdom Word welling up from the source of life. We praise and worship you. Renew our strength today, that we may rise with wings like eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint.

God of transforming justice and peace, you come to us in Christ for the sake of the world, pouring out the living water of your grace. We worship and honour you. Give us this water always, gushing from the spring of eternal life, that refreshed in spirit, we may rise in Christ to live out the abundance of his grace.

God of abiding love, you have given us of your Spirit that we may abide in you, loving one another as you have loved us in Christ. We honour and adore you. Flood us with liberating hope that we may rise to proclaim the healing salvation of the world, embodying the perfect love that casts out fear. **Amen.**

Let us open our hearts to God in confession.

When we dishonour your creation, and look away from you our Creator, seeking other sources of life and hope. God have mercy: **have mercy on us.**

When we block the flow of your grace drawing refreshment from the wells that leave us thirsty. Christ have mercy: **have mercy on us.**

When we fall short of your love for the world, failing to love you with all that we are and turning our backs on our neighbours. God have mercy: **have mercy on us.**

Call us again as your children to return to you through the abundance of your grace along the liberating highway of hope. **Amen**

### **Declaration of Forgiveness**

Sisters and Brothers, God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. We love because God first loved us.

Hear Christ's word of abundant grace, and drink deep from the well of his hope. We are loved, We are forgiven, We are free. **Thanks be to God.**

**The Peace:** The peace of Christ be always with you. **And also with you.**

*You are invited to exchange a sign of peace.*

## LISTENING TIME

Song: TIS 427 Lord, your word abiding ...

**Bible readings:** Read by Suzie Fergusson

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

**2 Samuel 6.1-5 and 12b-19**

**David Brings the Ark to Jerusalem - 6** David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. <sup>2</sup> David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. <sup>3</sup> They carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the

new cart <sup>4</sup> with the ark of God, and Ahio went in front of the ark. <sup>5</sup> David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing, <sup>13</sup> and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatted calf. <sup>14</sup> David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. <sup>15</sup> So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. <sup>16</sup> As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart.

<sup>17</sup> They brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. <sup>18</sup> When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts <sup>19</sup> and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

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**Mark 6: 14-29** - <sup>14</sup>Now King Herod heard about all this, because Jesus' reputation had spread everywhere. Some people were saying, "*John the Baptist has come back to life! That is why he has this power to perform miracles.*" <sup>15</sup>Others, however, said, "*He is Elijah.*" Others said, "*He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.*"

<sup>16</sup>When Herod heard it, he said, "*He is John the Baptist! I had his head cut off, but he has come back to life!*" <sup>17</sup>Herod himself had ordered John's arrest, and he had him chained and put in prison. Herod did this because of Herodias, whom he had married, even though she was the wife of his brother Philip. <sup>18</sup>John the Baptist kept telling Herod, "*It isn't right for you to be married to your brother's wife!*" <sup>19</sup>So Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she could not because of Herod.

In this may we hear God's word for today – **thanks be to God!**

The Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

**Prayer** - Come Holy Spirit. As we listen to the testimony of Scripture help us to hear and know the living Word upon whom salvation depends. Move us by your grace, like a river flowing to the sea. Stir in us your wisdom and truth, as the breeze blows a grassfire, renewing the land. And inspire us to hope, like a new-born child drawing its first breath. In the name of Christ, Word and Wisdom incarnate. **Amen.**

**Preaching – Some matters to ponder ...** (Thanks to these notes from the Rev Dr John Squires – UCA Retired)

**"Herod and the John the Baptist"**

*The head of the Baptist – by Caravaggio*



**Why did Herod put John to death?**

We have two detailed accounts of the death of John. **Mark**, as we have seen, portrays Herod as equivocating. He tries to move the primary responsibility of John's death away from Herod, by interspersing his daughter and her request. Perhaps Mark feels the need to excuse the

Roman-supported ruler of the time, to avoid having the Jesus movement portrayed as a terrorist movement?

After all, even though Jesus was clearly crucified under orders from the Roman Governor, Pilate (Mark 15:15), Mark does have Pilate bow to the pressure of the crowd that is calling out “crucify him”, by asking the question, “what evil has he done?” (15:12–14). It is Mark who provides our earliest source for placing the blame on the chief priests”, who had stirred up the crowd to press for Jesus to be crucified (15:10–11). So if there an apologetic purpose in the passion narrative—blame the Jews, excuse the Romans – then is a similar apologetic happening in the story of John’s death? blame Herodias, excuse Herod.

John’s criticisms of Herod’s divorce and subsequent marriage did not sit well with Herod. John’s popularity meant that he was persuading many others to this negative view of Herod. Indeed, God later vindicates the criticisms made by John, according to Josephus, who says that God punished Herod by his later defeat in battle. Josephus writes:

“Herod had put him to death, though he was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practise justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in baptism.

“In [John’s] view this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behaviour.

“When others too joined the crowds about him, because they were aroused to the highest degree by his sermons, Herod became alarmed. Eloquence that had so great an effect on mankind might lead to some form of sedition, for it looked as if they would be guided by John in everything that they did.

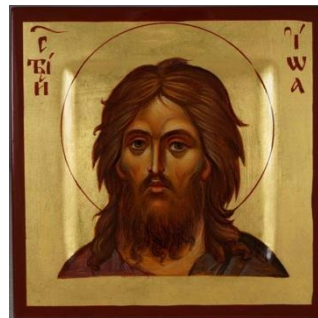
### **John and the prophetic tradition**

The fact that Herod finds John to be of interest is rather unusual. As a ruler under Roman control, he might be expected to want to repress Jewish voices, to ensure that order is kept in society. And yet, Herod has a Jewish heritage, and would know of the importance of the voice of the prophets within that heritage.

**Nathan** called out David for his adultery (2 Sam 12). **Elijah** spoke boldly against King Ahab (1 Ki 17–19, 21) and King Ahaziah in Samaria (2 Ki 1). **Elisha** spoke out to King Jehoram (2 Ki 3). **Amos** spoke out against King Jeroboam (Amos 7). **Isaiah** declared the word of the Lord to Hezekiah (2 Ki 20).

**Haggai** likewise guided Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, after the exile (Hag 1) and at the same time **Zechariah** was making declarations to King Darius of Persia (Zech 7). The role of the prophet was to be an essential, irritant in the ears of rulers, to be the niggling (and perhaps even booming) voice in the ears of rulers.

**John** stands, it would seem, in that tradition. Not only was he an irritant to “people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem” (Mark 1:5), calling them to repentance and baptizing them as they confessed their sins. He was also, according to this story, an irritant to the ruler of the time—Herod Antipas. Herod, Mark says, regarded John as “a righteous and holy man” (6:20)—high praise indeed. Herod, Mark says, “protected” John and “liked to listen to him” (6:20). And yet, he is persuaded to arrest and then behead John, not of his own initiative, but by keeping the promise he had made to Herodias (6:26–28).



John’s popularity was his undoing; it seemed that many liked to listen to John and accepted his criticisms of Herod and Herodias. Jesus’s popularity was also his undoing. Large crowds had followed Jesus since early in Galilee (Mark: 2:13; 3:20, 32; 4:1; 5:21; 24, 30–31; 6:34; 7:14; 8:1–2, 34; 9:14–15, 25; 10:1, 46; 11:18; 12:37).

The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem were offended at the teachings they heard from Jesus in the temple; “they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd” (Mark 12:12). in similar fashion, Mark notes that those priests and scribes “were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John [the Baptist] as truly a prophet” (11:32).

In many churches today, “good discipleship” or “being a good Christian” would seem to be equated with “being a good citizen”. John provides a model that steps out of the bounds of “good citizenship”. Is this a model for us to consider? For instance, in the *Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice* in my own church (the Uniting Church in Australia), section 6.2 states that “It is unethical for Ministers deliberately to break the law or encourage another to do so. The only exception would be in instances of political resistance or civil disobedience.”

Time for reflection

## RESPONDING TIME

Song: TIS 164 The great love of God... the offering will take place during the singing ...

Announcements ...

**Prayers of the People:** Prepared by Heather Baxter

Including the leaders and the people of the countries of Eritrea and Ethiopia. We continue to pray for: Sudan, Afghanistan, the United Nations, the Middle East, Ukraine.

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

Father

We thank you for the wonderfully diverse people who make this world of yours a better place.

For the people who show random and unexpected acts of kindness – often to those who are unknown to them.

For the people who struggle with their own health, yet manage to see the outsider in need and find a way to empathise with that person.

For the people who have brave and courageous thoughts about ways forward in difficult situations – smoothing troubled waters and solving unsolvable problems

For the people who search for you, God, and find a way to inner peace, and then point out the direction to us.

For musicians and artists who create magnificent works – works that take our breath away and leave us as changed people.

For the people who doggedly continue to persevere at the boring tasks of life, in order that others may live life to the full.

For the generous people we meet – generous with their time and money.

We pray that we will

-show random acts of kindness, and empathise with others.

-that we will be brave and courageous in our searching for answers to unsolvable problems,

-that we will search for you God,

-that we will use our talents, our perseverance and our generosity to serve others and in so doing find the peace you give.

Amen

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.

## SCATTERING TIME

Song: 413 Holy Spirit, come confirm us

### Blessing

Go in peace – to love and serve the Lord ...

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

May the feet of God walk with you, and God's hand hold you tight.  
May the eye of God rest on you, and God's ear hear your cry.  
May the smile of God be for you, and God's breath give you life.  
May the Child of God grow in you, and God's love bring you home.

*You are warmly invited to share a 'cuppa' in the room next door*

### 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 Dr Tony Floyd  
Music: Peter Hurley

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