

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



21 JULY 2024

PENTECOST 9



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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

From before recorded time, the First Peoples cared for this Land. We praise the Creator for the beauty of this land and honour those who have offered themselves in tending it. We acknowledge the Elders and communities who have told the sacred stories and nurtured faithfulness to the Creator. We ask God’s blessing on those who continue to work for the healing and restoration of this land and her communities.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to you all.

This afternoon we are looking at rest, repose, relaxation, respite - taking a breather.

I heard the story of an elderly worshipper commenting on one of the verses used by Jesus in our gospel reading this afternoon. She said that ‘in the King James Version of, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while,” it was translated "Come apart and rest a while, " which, she said, is a reminder that if you don't "rest a while" you "will come apart"!'

And another comment I came across in my preparations for today was of a worshipper thankful for a sermon she had heard, expressing her gratitude for (quote): ‘making me look a little closer at the "virtue" of rest-as opposed to continual striving!’ (End of quote.)

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Welcome!

Welcome to the baggage we carry, the joys we share, the griefs we bear, and the worries we hold.

Come! Let us worship!

The voice of God is calling us to come with all that we are and all that we carry to worship.

Come! Let us worship!

God calls us to gather, to receive grace in our gathering, and to reorient us again to the ways of God.

Come! Let us worship!

So, come, members of the family of God! Bring all that you are to be moulded by grace, refocused toward Love, and woven together as community in Christ.

Come! Let us worship! Thanks be to God. Amen.

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

HYMN TIS 121: God himself is present

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION:

Let us pray

We praise you wondrous God for giving us all we need in life

Gracing us with your love

Transforming us through your resurrection

Inspiring us to flourish through the presence of your Spirit

Great God of generosity and grace, equip us with the gifts we need to grow your Kingdom on earth

Equip us, God, for the work of ministry. For the work involved with building unity of purpose and vision.

Equip us with saints who will say yes to your will and yes to your way.

Equip us, God, to journey with Jesus through life's uncertain paths.

Equip us, God, with maturity that comes from knowing you.

Equip us, God, to speak the truth in love even when it's uncomfortable.

Equip us to move beyond a childish faith that whines for more while giving less.

Equip us, O God, for the work of ministry that you have called us to do. Amen.

Adapted from a prayer written by Kwasi I. Kena, The Africana Worship Book, Year B (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), 136.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

And when we fail to accept the gifts with which you equip we ask for your forgiveness
(together)

Have mercy us on, O God, according to your steadfast love. For we know our sins which are always in front of our eyes. We have not loved you as deeply as our own heartbeat.

We have failed to care for your body and for the whole of creation. Forgive us.

According to your abundant mercy, blot out our transgressions and cleanse us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and sustain in us a willing spirit. Free us to know joy and gladness and to live our days in praise.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Gracious God

We stop!

We come!

We listen!

We hear!

We accept!

We are forgiven

We praise!

We go!

Renewed to be your people

All praise be to your name!

Hallelujah!

AMEN

THE PEACE:

The Peace of the Lord be always with you

And also with you

We share the PEACE

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: Read by Lorraine Denniston

Your Word, Oh Lord, is a lamp to our feet;

A light to our path

EPHESIANS 2:11-27

¹¹So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision” —a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— ¹²remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

HYMN TiS 659: The Lord is my Shepherd

MARK 6:30-34, [35-52], 53-56

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

SERMON: “Rest Easy!”

Everyone knows we are in the midst of a crisis at the moment, well, at least I think we are!

And before I proceed any further let me add that in too many ways, I am failing at what I preach today – and may God forgive me for that!

Back to crises!

Surely a crisis of war, you say – Ukraine, Russia, Syria, Israel, Gaza – there are 30 wars, apparently across the globe!

And Jesus speaks to that crisis with the peace that only God can bring – real peace lasting peace, a gift from God – in Christ reconciling all, even amid all our wars. And of course, in faith we need to ‘fight’ for real peace as Christian Disciples (with the weapons of non-violence!)

Yes, as important as that crisis is, it is not the one I was thinking of.

Well then, what about the crisis of poverty and starvation – still, in 2024, over a third of the world’s population only have a one meal a day which is obviously not enough and leaves them vulnerable to malnutrition and disease – and yet we have the resources across the globe to be able to feed all, if there was more equitable sharing of resources. And what does Jesus teach us to pray: ‘and give us this day our daily bread!’

It is great that the Little Free Pantry stands not just as an active source of food for the hungry but in declaring that Christ is the bread of life!

BUT, as important as that crisis is, it is not the one I was thinking of.

Well then, what about the crisis of domestic and gender violence across this nation and across all nations of the world? Violence which results in innocent children being burnt to death in a terrible holocaust of hellish fire by a ‘very sick’ man, and thousands upon thousands, of women being raped, tortured and killed by their supposed partners, each week! Jesus himself died a violent death. He was unfairly and brutally treated, bullied, belittled and done away with by the loveless religious and powerful political authorities because he lived for real love in all his and our relationships. We are called as Christians to live lives of non-violence and to work for reconciliation between conflicted people, to challenge systems and economies that lead to such a crisis.

Yes, as important as that crisis is, it is still not the one I was thinking of.

Then perhaps, it is the crisis of Climate Change, or liveability, or homelessness, or mental illness, or corruption in high places, or indifference, or...

No none of those – again as contrary as they can be to the way of Christ and the values of the Kingdom, there is another crisis which the gospel reading today lobs in our laps.

It is the crisis of busyness!

Now that may seem like a minor matter in view of the crises I have shared above – but I think not! In fact, I believe many of the crises mentioned above most likely have some, if not all, of their origin in this crisis of busyness, or you could call it hustle and bustle or constant pressure to meet inappropriate deadlines or endless meetings or the

overwhelming oppression of ceaseless bureaucratic procedures, forms, delays and detours etc!

Let me explain by way of a short story

When I was a chaplain at MLC I taught 'World Religions' to the yr 10s. I loved it. We regularly had guests from various religions in to share their religious faiths and practices. If we could not get guests in the flesh, we watched YouTube videos of people of various faiths. One of my favourites was a Jewish Professor of Mathematics (his name escapes me) sharing his understanding of the Jewish Sabbath. He ventured that for him the Sabbath was a Godsend because, apart from rehearsing the Passover meal with his family, he rested! Did little! Did not correct papers or read work stuff – he just spent time with family and friends – usually around a table sharing a meal and experiences and laughing and crying together. He offered that it was the Sabbath Day of rest that restored his spirit for his busy life in the coming week

So, Jesus says to his disciples

“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they [the disciples and Jesus] went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.’

For the disciples and Jesus, it was their 'day off!' The events of our Gospel reading took place when Jesus was hoping to get away from the pressures of ministry and relax with his community of faith – the disciples. To recharge and get ready for another round of spreading the Good News.

Of course, the hustle and bustle of the first Century crowd ensured that the folk who had heard about the miracle healer were not about to let him get away without dealing with them.

Everyone is entitled to some time off, aren't they? I treasure precious times off – I love to build things and fix things and help in the process of building my daughter and son-in-law's home. I'm sure you also, like time off to do a few of your favourite things, which you enjoy, and which relax you. Jesus took his disciples across the lake to get away from the crowds for a bit. He was very weary. His was involved in an exhausting ministry. He said to his friends:

“Come away with me to a lonely place, and rest a while.”

This is not the first or last time Jesus seeks solitude for himself and often not just for himself but for his disciples. Many, many times he seeks peace and quiet, his own space, so he can listen for what is important in his journey and to re-charge his batteries.

But of course, for Jesus, compassion takes over and he tends to the needs of the impatient and busy crowd.

St Mark says, 'he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd' and he teaches and heals many. And a little later (not in our reading today) he miraculously feeds them all.

Then he escapes the demands of the hustle and bustle of the crowd and seeks the solace of an isolated spot to pray.

Most of us are retired but often I feel like I (we??) are so caught up in responding to our understanding of the MISSION OF CHRIST as taking action, being busy and stretched to fit 'it' all in, that we don't take the time to be s-t-i-l-l. To connect with others in the

community, or with God and pray and ruminates and relax and 'take it easy' and do some learning and growing and entertain others and be by ourselves in contemplation and even, just have some fun! AND YES, as I said earlier, I confess I am one of the worst offenders!

So, I am glad many of you came to the OUC Xmas last night, (Sat, 20th July) because that is just one small but significant opportunity in which we as a community can simply connect and grow together and enjoy each other and have some fun together. You see, I see signs around me everywhere of the hectic pace of living most of our fellow citizens engage in (and us too!). So much rush and tear and pressure and doing and cutting in to free time, so that often you can see the tension written on the face of people, written deep into their very being. Leaving little space for quiet and retreat! We were created by the Almighty for sharing and community and being together – yes, also for achieving and being productive. Yes, proclaiming the truth of the Christian Gospel! Yes, giving our all for the sake of the Gospel.

BUT

Not becoming so possessed by our agendas that we leave ourselves no chance to contemplate, smell the flowers, wander through a park, play with the grandkids, pray, read stories about life and faith and being – at least one day a week or even one part of one day a week!

Let me conclude with some thoughts from Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay, Minister for Worship and Theology in the United Church of Christ in America

'Communities need rest as much as individuals. In the beginning, the Triune, Creating God rests. Jesus makes his entry into public ministry and almost immediately seeks rest. Here, Jesus insists that following the fruitful ministry of the disciples without his direct supervision and intervention, the disciples also [need] rest. Like Jesus, they will need it for their journey even if they do not feel that need at that moment.'

Remember Jesus does not so much call us to action, as to faith. His life, his faith, his death and his resurrection are all that is needed. Our Mission is to learn to rest secure in that grace and love of God, made possible through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Rest secure in that love and grace, and it will be made known to us what to do!

Let us pray

HYMN TiS 598: Dear Father, Lord of Humankind

ANNOUNCEMENTS OFFERING, DEDICATION:

HYMN TiS 612: Dear Lord for all in pain

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: 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.

As we come to our Prayers of the People, we begin by singing verse 1 of hymn number 612. We will sing verses 2 and 3 at the conclusion of the prayers.

Dear Lord, for all in pain
To you we pray;
O come and smite again
Your enemy.

Let us pray

Dear Lord, in this world of busyness, intensity, violence and conflict, we come to seek rest for our souls and peace for all peoples.

Too many of us, Lord, spend our lives rushing from one thing to the other. Those in work often find themselves under increasing pressure to take on new roles and responsibilities, or to meet increased demands. The rising cost of living forces many to work extra hours or extra jobs to make ends meet. Meanwhile, others struggle to fill their days with meaningful activities and gradually lose the confidence to take on even voluntary roles. Help us, Lord, to cope when we are under pressure, to find ways to share the load and to encourage and support those who have lost their sense of purpose in life.

Over time, Lord, there seems to have been a ramping up of the intensity of life. Increasingly, people are expected to reach higher – in education, in aspirations, in achievements. Expectations have changed and pressure has increased to reach the new societal norms. This places pressure on interpersonal relationships, so it is not surprising that we are seeing increased evidence of domestic violence and relationship dysfunction. Help us, Lord, to draw breath and to find ways to de-fuse this intensification of daily life, so that people may again hear that still, small voice of calm.

In a week in which the process of democracy has again been undermined by violence in the USA, and when innocent civilians have continued to be killed in Palestine and Ukraine, we pray for the restoration of peace and the delivery of true justice. Inspire our leaders and those in opposition, as well as the leaders of nations around the world, to set aside their concern about the political impacts of speaking out against such violence, so that they may work diligently instead to resolve conflicts and bring about true justice and peace. Help us, Lord, to recognise the ways in which we can be the voice of quiet and reason in these difficult times.

We pray, too, Lord for a sense of quiet and calm for all who are struggling within themselves: for those suffering from mental illness; for those whose physical health is compromised; and for those facing the end of their life. Grant them strength and courage to deal with their health issues and inspire those who care for them to be compassionate and caring. Help us, Lord, to cope with our own frailties and to find genuine ways to share your peace with the suffering.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, 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**

And now let us join in verses 2 and 3 of hymn number 612.

Give to your servants skill
To soothe and bless,
And to the tired and ill
Give quietness.

And, Lord, to those that know

Pain may not cease,
Come near, that even so
They may have peace.

HYMN TiS 636: God has spoken to his People

DISMISSAL:

Now go, to greet stranger and dear friend equally.

We will share God's steadfast love as we seek to live in faithfulness.

Now go, to share Christ's compassion with everyone.

We will tear down dividing walls and build bridges of hope.

Now go, to live as one, as the Spirit gathers you with others.

We will build communities that welcome all, especially the outsiders.

(c) Thom M. Shuman

BLESSING:

The love of God enfold you,
the wisdom of Christ enlighten you,
the fire of the Spirit enflame you;
and may the blessing of the holy triune God
rest upon and abide with you,
now and evermore

Amen

WORD OF MISSION:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen

RECESSIONAL HYMN TiS 779: May the feet of God.

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.

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: Karen Roberts

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