

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

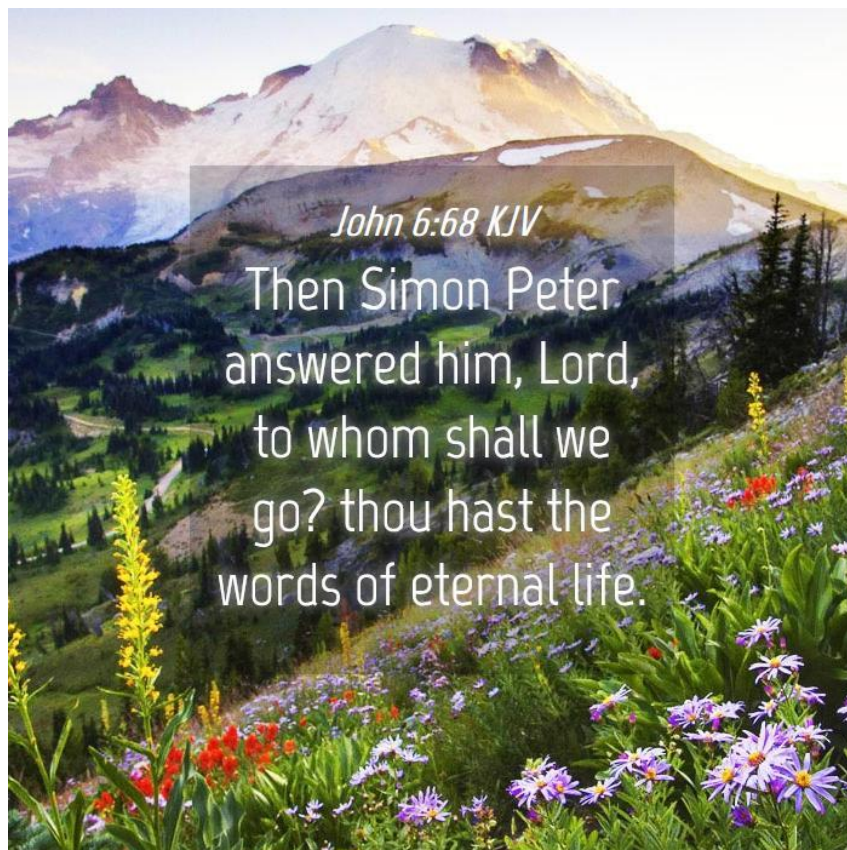


25 AUGUST 2024

PENTECOST 14

STAY OR GO!!!??

*SO, JESUS ASKS HIS FOLLOWERS: WILL YOU
STAY OR GO??*



*'WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH
GET GOING!'*

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.

Go to your prepared place OR prepare a space in the house; a comfortable chair, a lit 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 you all.

It is amazingly wonderful to meet God, at home with God, or in a ‘temple’ where we can connect, not only with fellow travellers on the Christian journey, but with the God who is Leader, Lover, Laughter Liberator, Life and Lord.

A member of the congregation approached me a few weeks ago and shared with me a poem – I want to share it with you now because it is just right for what we are thinking about today. Put positively, ‘WHY WE SHOULD STAY!’ More on that later!

So, to the poem, which I have very slightly adapted.

The members of the Human Race are the tenants, but God is the Landlord, and when it is time to leave, God will take you home.

Thank you, Rex!

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Jesus said: 'I am the Bread of Life . . .

whoever eats this Bread will always live.'

This is a tough teaching, too tough to swallow.

Jesus said: 'Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.'

This is a tough teaching, too tough to hear.

Jesus said to all he met: 'Follow me.'

We have accepted Jesus, and seek to be faithful, no matter how tough it is to follow him.

Rev Thom M Shuman.

HYMN TIS 414: There's a spirit by Brian Wren

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION:

ADORATION

Let us pray
Holy God,
Home of all who seek you:
may you find in our hearts paths to walk,
wandering with us through dark valleys,
dipping us in pools of living water,
lifting our faces to the grace
falling softly upon us.

Loving Lord,

Speaker of tough words:
we would wish for an easy life
as we follow you to our Home.
Help us to see that when we mop floors,
we find our meaning;
when we hammer nails,
we discover our hope;
when we embrace the sick,
we touch our healing.

Spirit of Strength,
Bearer of our prayers,
we would ask for:
the strength
to say 'yes'
when 'no' is on our lips;
the wisdom
to welcome all
into our hearts;
the longing
to be with you
always.

God in Community, Holy in One,
hear us we pray.

AMEN

A CALL TO RECONCILIATION

If it was easy to follow Jesus, we would not need to ask for forgiveness. But it is tough - tough to say 'yes,' tough to be graceful, tough to be loving. Yet whatever we do, God loves us enough to forgive us and to feed us with the Bread of Life. Let us pray OUT LOUD, saying,

God, our sun and shield: we may long to be in your house, but our deeds show how tough it is for us to live there. Called to follow, we search for paths to take us back to our old ways; given the words of eternal life, we weakly proclaim the gospel to others; offered the path of salvation to walk upon, we stumble down the rocky roads of our world.

Forgive us, Guardian of our lives. Strengthen us with your Spirit, so we may serve your people with all that brings them life. Let your Word, Jesus Christ, the One we have come to believe and know is our Lord and Savior, be confirmed in us in every word, every deed, every thought, every moment in the days to come.

Silence is kept

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Today, receive the Bread of Life;
today, hear the words of eternal hope;
today, trust in the One who hears your prayers,
and showers grace and forgiveness upon you.

Today, we are set free to serve God's people, and to sing God's praises. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Thom M Shuman

THE PEACE:

The Peace of the Lord be always with you

And also with you

We share the PEACE – perhaps offer a handshake or hug of peace to some of the people you meet today

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: Lorraine Denniston

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

A light to our path

1 KINGS 8 [1, 6, 10-11], 22-30, 41-43.

²²Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. ²³He said, “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, ²⁴the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. ²⁵Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, ‘There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.’ ²⁶Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David. ²⁷“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! ²⁸Regard your servant’s prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; ²⁹that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. ³⁰Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

⁴¹“Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name ⁴²—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, ⁴³then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be

able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

HYMN TiS 44: How Lovely Is Your Dwelling Place

based on the Scottish Psalter 1650

JOHN 6: 56-69

⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” ⁶⁶Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

The gospel of the Lord
Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

HYMN TiS 600: O My Saviour Lifted *William Walsham How 1823-97*

SERMON: TO GO OR TO STAY?

I wonder what you get offended about.

In other words, what do you find offensive?

Maybe:

When you are treated like an idiot (‘what do you know?!’)

OR

When you are presumed upon, taken advantage of. When you are taken for granted. (eg people ‘use’ you)

OR

When you are compared with people you don’t want to be compared with (‘Oh you are sounding just like DT!’)

OR

When people say something about you which you know is not true. (Like: ‘Gee you really are a mean person!’)

OR

When people sneer at you and laugh at you openly or behind your back (Perhaps because you take a view which is contrary to the ‘going view.’)

Let me take you on a journey to the lakeside near Gennesaret to observe what is going on there because, believe it or not, a lot of people there are taking offense!

The crowds who have been fed and sustained by the miraculous feeder are dispersing – leaving. Nothing unusual there, you say – they have had their fill and are heading home – fed by the miracle man, Jesus of Nazareth.

But a closer look reveals a crowd who are sneering, jeering, taking offense at Jesus. How so!?

Why? Why are they offended?

Let me share a few theories:

Perhaps they are offended because they didn’t get enough – they wanted more of the same – Well, no, that doesn’t ‘cut it’: after the feeding of the 5000 there were heaps of leftovers of both bread and fish!

OR

Well! How about jealousy! “Gees, who does this upstart from Nazareth think he is, he’s full of himself, thinks he’s a real ‘big shot! A bigger shot than Moses even! Next thing, he’ll be running for Prime Minister of Israel (I guess he’d do a lot better job than the present incumbent!’)

But no, Jesus has no political aspirations!

So why? Why take offense at him?

Here’s a clue as to why many of his followers take offence and leave (and note, even the 12 closest disciples of Jesus are sceptical – they also openly question the teaching he shared about himself, which seems to be the key to the offense being taken.) Namely:

“⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

I just imagine myself being there and thinking: ‘What a load of poppycock!’

So, let me turn to Brendan Byrne for a clearer answer on why the crowd might have taken offense. He asks:

‘But what precisely is the ‘hard teaching’ that they find impossible to accept? At first sight, it might seem to be Jesus’ claim that his flesh is real food and his blood real drink. Yet. His response, ‘What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?’ suggests that beyond the eucharistic suggestion, the problem is with his claim to be the ‘Bread of life come down from heaven’, a new “manna”, superior in life-giving power to the Law of Moses.’

To most Jews back then this would have been deeply offensive – not just their misunderstanding of the deeper spiritual meaning of, ‘eating his flesh and drinking his blood!’ BUT they were offended by someone who would dare to claim to be greater than their religious law, based around their rescuer from Egypt, Moses who led them out of slavery to freedom and a new land, and ensured they were fed in the wilderness. Any claim to be greater than Moses offended them deeply.

There’s a tragedy here – a sad tragedy - both for the followers back then and the followers today, of Jesus. They were spiritually blind, unable to see in him, in Jesus, the true Bread from Heaven, their Messiah, who was, indeed the fulfilment of the Mosaic law!

So, what about us ‘now’ follower!?

Why today, in our community and in the world and indeed in the church as well, do people not recognise in Jesus the gift of abundant life? Isn’t that what we all want? Why do we take offense and turn away? Take offense at the idea of a God who loves so much that he would die for us?

I don’t know! I don’t know the answer to that! I don’t know! I don’t understand!

More than anything else in life I wish I knew the solution to that rejection – not usually a loud and violent rejection, just a silent passive indifferent rejection of the only one who can truly make sense of our lives – PLUS give the gift of new life, which is lived in eternal joy and hope and love!

To be brutally honest, I struggle with how to deal with people’s embarrassed indifference and offense at Jesus, as the God who dies out of love for all Her children!

I get so sad about this. And not just at the offense of others – but at my own shallow faith! You see, when I am in that crowd on the shores at Gennesaret I too walk away sneering, taking offense, claiming his call to commitment to such a God is too much to swallow!!

Is it because of my lack of love - our lack of love. That people walk away. Yes, I’m sure that’s true – but God’s grace still abounds despite our rejection!

We take offense at: “⁵⁸[I am] the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Preposterous! Like the disciples back then, we are conditioned to pour scorn on such illogical and mysterious teaching, IN OUR TIME: “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” It trespasses on our sensitivities, challenges our pre-occupation with our ‘things,’ our world, our life and our culture! Bread of life come down from heaven – REALLY!!

How do we address this offensive teaching, who can accept it!!!??

I turn to a poem from Bruce Prewer entitled to give some sort of answer

WILL YOU ALSO GO AWAY?

*The sun shone bright, the crowds were there,
the kingdom seemed quite near
but Jesus did not preach to please
so, some began to sneer.*

*He spoke of life that comes through death,
his blood and flesh abused.
He asked them all to eat to their fill
but they were not amused.*

*"We cannot stomach this," they said,
"He's mad or just a liar."
Like clots of discontent, they left
to find some new messiah.*

*A cold wind blew across the sea
to the remnant on the shore.
"Will you too go far away?" he said.
"The tide has turned for sure."*

*Quick, as usual, Peter spoke
the first thing in his head:
"Where else can we go, dear Lord,
Without you we are dead."*

*From that day on the way was hard
and Judas became sour,
till Christ would all forsaken be
in his finest hour.*

*I find myself on that same shore
where crowds saw him in flesh.
Their footprints are long swept away
but I find his still fresh.*

© B.D. Prewer 2000

And another poem from Christina Georgina Rossetti 1830 – 1894 an English writer of romantic, devotional, children's poems and hymns including the wonderful "Love Came Down at Christmas." Rosetti penned the following:

*'No other lamb, no other name,
No other hope in heaven or earth or sea.
No other resting place from sin and shame.
None beside thee!'*

The Good News of Jesus Christ, his life death and resurrection IS utterly offensive to our human rational sensitivities. But, as Rex so rightly pointed out, we don't live in 'OUR' world, we live in GOD'S world, given, governed and glorified by God's divine logic, of which the foundation is: God's eternal love of her creation and his creatures: God's logic - don't be offended – just believe, and trust and accept the gift of God's abundant life.

⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

I conclude with the WLTTW prayer associated with this reading.

Let us pray

God of life, lead us on our journey to places of resurrection, to dwellings of peace, to healings of wounds, to joys of discovery

We pray in the name of the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

**SONG: "Choose this day the one you'll follow! -
Tune TiS 292 (Infant Holy)**

1. "Choose this day the
one you'll follow!
Choose the one to guide your way!"
So a leader
told his people
as he spoke to them one day.
"Some see other
gods and follow;
they put trust in
what is hollow.
You must choose whom you'll obey!"
You must choose whom you'll obey!"
2. "As for me and
those in my house,
we'll serve God, and God alone!"
Lord, these words of
challenge meet us
in our families and our homes.
For the values
all around us
often trouble
and confound us.
Can we live as you have shown?
Can we live as you have shown?"
3. In a world that
finds its pleasure
in the things that money buys,
We are called to
different treasure
as we hear your people's cries.
May our families
find in serving
those the world calls
undeserving,
bread that truly satisfies.
Bread that truly satisfies.
4. In a world where
recreation
tempts our families from the pews,
May we ponder
what the faith means
as we help our families choose.
By example,
are we leading —
or are other
things impeding
how we live your wondrous news?
How we live your wondrous news?"
5. In a world of
war and violence,
may we follow Christ each day.
Where oppression
meets with silence,

may our families act and pray.
May we find in
faith and practice
how our homes can
be a witness
as we follow Jesus' Way.
As we follow Jesus' Way.

(c) Carolyn Winfrey - used with her permission

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: Di Richter

"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.

Let us pray:

We read the news, hear the stories, watch the images, see the footage
And feel helpless in the face of so much struggle and suffering.
Should we go, or should we stay?

We offer these prayers to you, God of all,
Because we cannot carry them alone,
Because you listen,
Because you love the world we inhabit. This is why we should stay.

We bring to you those people and places that are most on our hearts today:

- For the hungry and the homeless, including the people of Gaza and other war torn countries in our world
- For the lost and the forgotten who do not have the love and care of family
- For those who are ill or injured – we have been asked today to pray especially for Bruce, husband of Carol who wrote the words of “Choose this day the one you’ll follow!”
- For the grieving and suffering, including people experiencing unwanted changes in their lives or the death of loved ones
- For the abused and the imprisoned – may they find freedom and peace
- For the broken and rejected who experience exclusion from community and all it’s benefits

Let your light shine into the darkest places;

- Shine with justice where there is none,
- Shine with hope where it is lost,
- Shine with healing and connection.

Help us to believe, trust and accept the gift of God’s abundant life that we may be bearers of his light in the small corners where we are.

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**

HYMN TiS 611: God of Grace

1. God of grace and God of glory,
on your people pour your power;
now fulfil your Church's story,
bring the bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.
2. See the hosts of evil round us
scorn your Christ, assail his ways.
Fears and doubts too long have bound us;
free our hearts to work and praise.
Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.
3. Cure your children's warring madness;
bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal.
4. Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the gift of your salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
serving you whom we adore,
serving you whom we adore.

Harry Emerson Fosdick 1878-1969

DISMISSAL:

Let us go now, to share God's strength.

We will do so by embracing the weakness of others.

Let us go now, to be as alert as Jesus.

We will do so by noticing the brokenness all around us.

Let us go now, to share the life of the Spirit.

We will do so by receiving the bread of life from the poor.

(c) Thom M. Shuman

BLESSING:

May the mind that was in Christ possess you,
the love that is always at the heart of God, enlarge you,
and the joy of the Spirit give you kindly eyes and thankful soul.

Amen!

(c) Bruce Prewer

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.

Aubrey Podlich 1946-

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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