

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



22 SEPTEMBER 2024

PENTECOST 18



Children and Servants

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.

GREETING

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
And the love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all
And also with you

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome everyone to this day that God has given us. I hope you have had a peaceful and joyous Sunday. Today's service is giving thanks to God for the salvation and liberation Christ offers through the practice of humility. Far from being something that diminishes us, humility opens us up to God and the world and expands our sense of self beyond the confines of our self-exaltation and self-judgement.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather today to worship the One who created us,
The One who calls us,
The One who sustains us,
The One who loves us without end.
With joyful hearts, let us worship God.

Amen!

Let us sing hymn 387 'Christ is Alive! Let Christians sing

HYMN 387 – Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing

1. Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.
2. Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time.
3. In every insult, rift and war,
where color, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, where even hope has died.

4. **Women and men, in age and youth,
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth,
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.**

5. **Christ is alive, and comes to bring
good news to this and every age,
till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love and praise.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND ADORATION

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for your wisdom and humility
are the source of true greatness
and you draw near to all who draw near to you.

Like a woman planting a garden,
you set out and tended the newborn earth,
and like one who sets food before her family,
you nourished us with the fruits of the earth
and the wise teachings of your Word.

In every age you have revealed your wisdom
to the humble and insignificant ones
and hidden it from the arrogant and violent.
In your Son, Jesus, you showed us
that true greatness is known in servanthood,
and that the way of wisdom is found in childlike simplicity.
Betrayed into hostile hands and killed,
he rose again and called us to follow him,
putting aside selfish ambitions
and walking in the ways of peace, mercy and humility.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Let us pray a prayer of confession.

Dear God,

In both succumbing to selfish impulses and dwelling in self-criticism we fail to put you at the centre of our lives.

In penitence and faith, let us confess our sins to almighty God in a moment of silence.

...

Let us pray together:

**Merciful God,
Our maker and our judge,
We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed:**

**We have not loved you with our whole heart,
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;
We repent, and our sorry for all our sins
Father, forgive us.
Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life;
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Hear the assurance of the apostle Paul , "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.". Paul proclaims that in Christ, no matter what you have done you are not bound by the past. And so I declare to you Christ's word of forgiveness: Your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

PASSING OF THE PEACE

Christ is our peace. He has reconciled us to God in one body by dying on the cross and rising to new life.

We meet in his name and share his peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD – Suzie Fergusson

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

A light to our path

Psalm 1

1 Happy are those

who do not follow the advice of the wicked
or take the path that sinners tread
or sit in the seat of scoffers,

2 but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.

3 They are like trees

planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.

In all that they do, they prosper.

4 The wicked are not so

but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous,

6 for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Mark 9:30-37

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." 32 But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

33 Then they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one

another who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them, and taking it in his arms he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

HYMN 650 – Brother, sister, let me serve you

- 1. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.**
- 2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.**
- 3. I will hold the Christlight for you
in the nighttime of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.**
- 4. I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.**
- 5. When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.**
- 6. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.**

SERMON

May the meditations of our hearts and our minds be always acceptable in your sight, God our strength and our redeemer.

Amen

Today I would like to talk about the difference between the life the disciples want to lead in our reading from Mark and the life that Jesus offers in response. I don't do this to condemn or judge the disciples. The more Christlike response is to understand and perhaps identify with the disciples' vulnerability. It's easy to wax lyrical about the nature of God's kingdom but to truly take the leap from the kingdom of the self to the kingdom of God can be a fearful struggle even in light of Christ's promise of love and liberation.

Today we heard the second prediction Jesus makes of his death in Mark's gospel. The first prediction is met with selfish rebuke from Peter. The second is met with misunderstanding and fear by the disciples. "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again" Jesus says. 'But', Mark tells us, 'they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it'. That the disciples are afraid suggests that their inability to understand is more like not really wanting to understand.

Jesus is their master and teacher whom they love. They have excited ideas about what this man they believe to be the Messiah can do for them and for Israel. One suspects the disciples are alarmed at the notion of Jesus being killed and unsure about what rising again really means. Adding to the alarm is the contradiction they see between Jesus being killed and Jesus being the Messiah. A defeated Messiah is no Messiah at all. Best to sidestep Jesus' words and remain sure in their ambitions.

But then we hear where denying the truth in service of ambition leads them. When the disciples reach the house in Capernaum Jesus asks them "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.' In direct response to Jesus' prophecy of death and resurrection they can think only of greatness, the kind of greatness measured in status and victory. They are trapped in delusion and selfishness.

But Jesus does not rebuke or condemn the disciples. He teaches them. He sits down, calls them over and says "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Note that a servant or slave would be the least likely to argue about their greatness. Yet if you want to be first in the Kingdom you are to have humility and serve others - the very opposite of the self-exaltation the disciples are indulging in.

This is a challenge for us as humans. We are too insecure about how we appear to others to silence our egos. By this I don't mean arrogance or self-importance. I mean we so easily fall into the trap of making something about us. For example, showing humility and serving others is not about whether we are charitable enough or even religious enough. That would just be another kind of status which draws the focus back upon ourselves. Similarly, being servant to all is not a kind of harmful self-neglect or competitive self-denial. Again, that makes it about us. Jesus is talking about an orientation to the world marked by openness and giving.

He then takes a small child in his arms and says "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." It's a touching scene accompanied by beautiful words but we ought not to fall into the trap of sentimentalising it. This is not a tribute to the innocence and immaturity of youth. In Jesus' time children had no status. In his letter to the Galatians Paul writes that, with regards to rights, minors are no better than those who are enslaved. So, by instructing the disciples to welcome a child Jesus is instructing them to welcome the vulnerable and the weak. He is telling them to forget their self-obsession and serve those in need.

Not only that, Jesus says "whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." So in welcoming the child they will be welcoming Christ himself and, by extension God. God, through Christ, is present in the weak and the vulnerable, joining them in their suffering. We see this in the parable of the sheep and the goats told by Jesus in Matthew 25 when the King - a metaphor for Jesus - says 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.' To welcome the weak and the vulnerable is to encounter Christ the divine.

But here is where Jesus' teaching takes on an almost mystical quality. Jesus spoke Aramaic. And in this language the word for child, talya, is the same as the word for servant. Now remember in verse 35 he says "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and **servant** of all." So to be first in the Kingdom they must take the role of a servant and not assert status. Yet they must also welcome the child, the one who has no status. The disciples, the one's who wish to be great, are taught that true greatness comes from being the talya and embracing the talya. From being humble and

embracing the humble. They are equally worthy of giving and receiving love in God's kingdom. Jesus is telling them that when they embrace a position of humility, vulnerability, and trust and welcome those with no status in the world, together, through Christ, they will share in the divine life. They, with Christ, will image the invisible God by reflecting God's all-consuming love.

This realisation is quite remarkable. But if we are honest with ourselves the reality of it can be truly frightening. Accepting that your sense of self-importance bears no relationship to your value as a human is immensely difficult. This is why, when the disciples are afraid, they react by asserting their own greatness. When Jesus says that he will rise again, the disciples are either afraid because they don't believe him and are afraid of his death or they do believe him and are afraid of resurrection. I contend that despite the fact that the resurrection is a source of hope we are afraid of both.

We all die, and one of the reasons we fear it, is because we realise that our sense of self-importance and our carefully cultivated identities, used to battle our insecurities, cannot protect us from our mortal end. But this is where Jesus offers us life in the face of death. Jesus' prophecies do not mean resurrection is only relevant to bodily death. In Paul's letter to the Romans he writes of being baptised into Jesus' death so that one dies and rises with Christ in new life. He instructs us and promises us that if we can rid ourselves of the need to impress or dominate others, if we can rid ourselves of the need to justify ourselves to others and ourselves, and if we can reach out to both God and neighbour we will share in the divine life, a new life, resurrection life.

But even when our efforts to justify ourselves lead to frustration and despair, the thought that salvation might lie beyond who we know ourselves to be can be deeply disorienting. This is because it is a kind of death to who we thought we were or should be. This is why we often fear the implication resurrection has for our lives. It's like the prisoner who becomes so used to their confinement that release is terrifying. Life in which we put ourselves at the centre is a prison but it is a comfortable one. This is why we gather to worship and sing and pray and encounter the risen Lord. By putting Christ at the centre, we seek to bring ourselves closer to God and each other and become a little less afraid.

Psalm 1 tells us that the righteous are like trees planted by streams of water yielding fruit in their season. Christ's love is the life-giving water we can let wash over us. Salvation through Christ has found us. Yet still we worry about death and the approval of others. Once again, I do not condemn this. But the joy of salvation is felt when we shed the ego and reach out to God and the other. It's no coincidence that Jesus teaches love and humility after predicting his death and resurrection. His resurrection inaugurates the kingdom of God and the kingdom of God looks a lot like the whole human race as child and servant sharing in the divine life. Death has lost its sting because in Christ's presence we break free of our self-constructed prisons to live in the eternal present.

Amen.

NICENE CREED

Let us affirm the faith by together reciting the Nicene Creed

**We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;**

of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
She spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

HYMN 607 – Make me a channel of your peace

1. Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.
2. Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

Refrain. Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul.

3. Make me a channel of your peace
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving to all men that we receive
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Refrain. Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul.

4. Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - Prepared by Heather Baxter

"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.

EXCERPTS FROM THE STATEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA: REV CHARISSA SULI
WORLD WEEK FOR PEACE IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL 2024

"As we gather to observe this World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, we are called to reflect on this year's theme: "Whatever you did... you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). This powerful reminder of our shared humanity urges us to stand in solidarity with those suffering on all sides of the conflict in the Holy Land. It is time for deep prayer, reflection, and a renewed commitment to peace.....

Out of our longstanding commitments to justice, peace, and reconciliation, we have consistently expressed our deep concern about this ongoing conflict which is a grave wound in the heart of God. We have called for the protection of human rights and international law, an end to illegal occupation, and a commitment to peaceful coexistence."

(full text: <https://uniting.church/president-world-week-for-peace/>)

With this in mind, we pray together

Father,

We see each evening on the news the devastation caused by the warring in the Middle East. The lost infrastructure, the grieving families and friends, the re-location of peoples to unsafe places, the over-flowing hospitals, the starving children, the creation of the next generations of hating populations.

We are at a loss to know how we can personally impact this devastation. We bring you this heartache of the people of the Middle East.

Father, work on the hearts of the people in power, convincing them to work for justice, a fair distribution of resources and land, and reconciliation. We know that lasting peace is only possible if justice and fairness are at the basis of that peace.

Father, we want to be on your side – and yet we find it hard to stand in someone else's shoes if we disagree with them. We become the warring grade 4 students – always wanting our own way, and always wanting to win the present argument. Our very self takes over rather than letting you take control of our lives. We fail to see that the way of peace is reconciliation in its broadest sense. We seek your wisdom to know in our hearts the way of peace for all with whom we come in contact.

Build us into your peace-makers we pray

In Jesus name we pray

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 forever.

Amen

OFFERING

We give in grateful thanksgiving for all that God has given us.
In the upside down world of the gospel,
we measure our wealth not by what we have,
but what we can give away.
Let us give away generously, in this offering,
To bless your church, your people, your creation.

HYMN 217(i) – Love Divine, all loves excelling

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n to earth come down,
fix in us Thy humble dwelling;
all Thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love Thou art;
visit us with Thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.
2. Come, Almighty to deliver;
let us all Thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve Thee as Thy hosts above;
pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,
glory in Thy perfect love.
3. Finish then, Thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see Thy great salvation
perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before Thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

WORD OF MISSION

Go out, with open and humble hearts.
Submit yourselves to God and resist the lure of self-obsession.
Delight in the Lord's teaching,
open your hands to the poor,
and let your actions arise from the wisdom of God.

And may God draw near to you and strengthen you;
May Christ Jesus teach you the ways of simplicity;
and may the Holy Spirit fill you with wisdom
and make you fruitful in peace and righteousness.

BLESSING

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

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: Brad Denniston

Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

Thursdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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NEWS & NOTICES