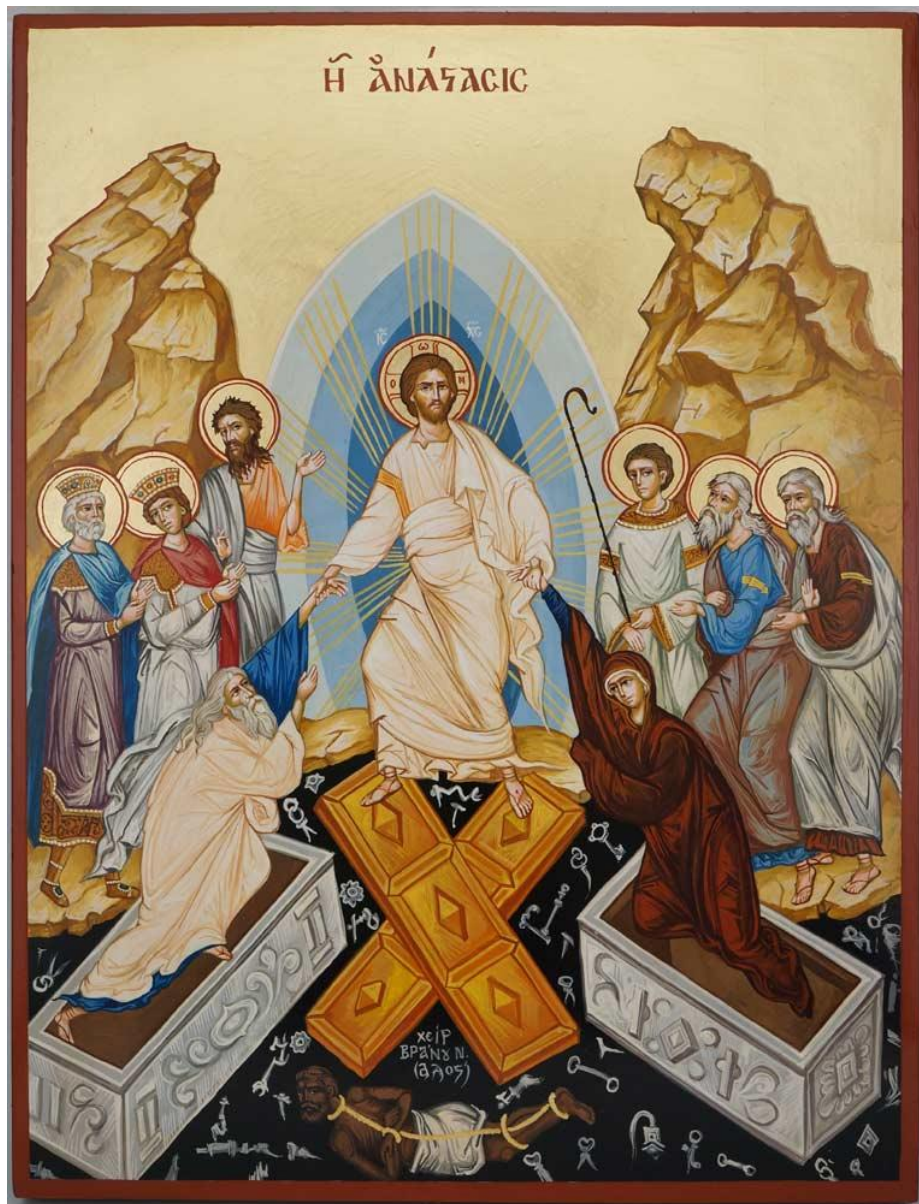


# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



29 SEPTEMBER 2024

PENTECOST 19



Rescue

# 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 friends to this day that God has given us.

In today's worship, we are reminded that that the God of love is on our side. The world contains suffering and evil but in worship we give thanks that through Christ's reconciling love we find rescue and restoration. This service invites us to praise the God who liberates us, who has rescued us from despair and brought us into life and joy.

Let us prepare our hearts for worship, and as we sing, pray, and reflect together, may we open ourselves to the transformative power of God's love. Please join me in the call to worship by responding with the words in bold on the slides or in your intimations.

## CALL TO WORSHIP

If the God of love had not been on our side, where would we be now?

**If the God of love had not been on our side,  
we would have been swallowed alive  
by the enemies of faith, joy and peace.**

But God was in Christ  
reconciling the world unto himself.

**God has not surrendered us like prey,  
we are liberated like birds from a cage.**

Therefore we will sing

**yes in the congregation of God's people  
we will sing praises of love and joy!**

Most wonderful, are you, God our Creator-Friend, from whom all blessings flow.

**Blessed are you, O God, the spring of the universe!**

Most wonderful are you, Christ our Redeemer-Friend, in you is abundant life and joy.

**Blessed are you, O God, the salvation of the universe!**

Most Wonderful are you, Holy Spirit, our True-Friend, in you we are young again.

**Blessed are you, O God, the joy of the universe!**

Amen

## **HYMN 161 – ‘Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord’**

- 1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!**  
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;  
tender to me the promise of his Word;  
in God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.
- 2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!**  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;  
his holy name, the Lord, the Mighty One.
- 3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!**  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.  
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.
- 4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his Word!**  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and forevermore!

## **PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING**

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,  
for in love and mercy you have rescued us  
from all that would harm us or lead us to destruction.

The earth and sky were created by your hand,  
and the land brings forth its harvest when you say.  
You committed yourself in love to your people,  
and saved them from the teeth of their enemies.

When we wandered into the pathways of death,  
you heard our plea for life  
and came to save us in your son, Jesus Christ.  
Confronting demonic forces  
and offering your healing and forgiveness to all,  
he honoured as allies all who took the side of life.  
He was killed by those who block the paths of the humble,  
but you raised him back to life  
and sent your Spirit to fill us with love, mercy  
and an uncompromising passion for righteousness.

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 together responsively:

O God, you search us out and know us,  
and all that we are is open to you.  
We confess that we are entangled in sin.

**In your mercy, Lord,  
forgive us and heal us.**

When we use our power to dominate  
and our weaknesses to manipulate:

**In your mercy, Lord,  
forgive us and heal us.**

When we evade responsibility  
and fail to confront evil:

**In your mercy, Lord,  
forgive us and heal us.**

When we are seduced by fashionable dreams  
and pursue our desires at the expense of others:

**In your mercy, Lord,  
forgive us and heal us.**

When we despair of changing the world  
and neglect to change even ourselves:

**In your mercy, Lord,  
forgive us and heal us.**

When we fail to integrate spirit and flesh  
and forfeit our wholeness and dignity:

**In your mercy, Lord,  
forgive us and heal us.**

We turn to you,  
O God of infinite mercy;

**We renounce evil;  
We claim your love;  
We choose to be made whole.**

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

...

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.**

Please share the peace with one another

## **THE SERVICE OF THE WORD** – Brenda Grootendorst

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

**A light to our path**

### **Psalm 124**

1 If it had not been the Lord who was on our side  
—let Israel now say—

2 if it had not been the Lord who was on our side,  
when our enemies attacked us,

3 then they would have swallowed us up alive,  
when their anger was kindled against us;

4 then the flood would have swept us away;  
the torrent would have gone over us;

5 then over us would have gone  
the raging waters.

6 Blessed be the Lord,  
who has not given us  
as prey to their teeth.

7 We have escaped like a bird  
from the snare of the hunters;  
the snare is broken,  
and we have escaped.

8 Our help is in the name of the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.

### **Mark 9:38-50**

38 John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us.” 39 But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 Whoever is not against us is for us. 41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

42 “If any of you cause one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, 48 where their worm never dies and the fire is never quenched.

49 “For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

### **1 Peter 3:8-9, 18-22**

8 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 9 Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight lives, were saved through water. 21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

This is the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

## **HYMN 547 – ‘Be thou my vision’**

- 1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art –  
thou my best thought, in the day or the night,  
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.**
- 2. Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;  
I ever with thee, and thou with me, Lord;  
thou my great Father, and I thy true son;  
thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.**
- 3. Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,  
thou my soul’s shelter, and thou my high tower;  
raise thou me Heavenward, O Power of my power.**
- 4. Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise;  
thou mine inheritance, now and always:**

**thou, and thou only, be first in my heart,  
High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.**

- 5. High King of Heaven, thou bright Heaven's Sun,  
grant me its joys, after vict'ry is won;  
heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be my Vision, O ruler of all.**

## **SERMON**

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

**Amen**

Today's Gospel reading from Mark is a challenge. We are confronted by disturbing images of fire and self-harm. But if we read it in the context of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection there is a profound message of hope underlying this difficult passage. So, while my theme today is rescue, it is not rescue from some horrible punishment inflicted by God. What Jesus Christ rescues us from is separation from God.

Last week we saw the disciples arguing between themselves about who is the greatest. Now we see them complaining about someone other than themselves performing exorcisms. "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us." They've missed the point completely. They are trying to dictate who can and can't perform acts of healing. Jesus responds "Do not stop him, for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us." By taking the focus off who is doing the exorcism and putting it on the importance of the act itself, Jesus is showing that his mission is a battle against evil, sin and death through healing and reconciling love.

When Jesus then speaks of the consequences of sinful behaviour he uses extreme, exaggerated imagery to demonstrate what is at stake. Spiritual matters have far greater consequence than the state of our physical bodies. The problem is we read a statement like 'if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off' and think this is some kind of moral instruction related to a particular sinful behaviour. But two things should make us cautious about this. Firstly, he is speaking directly to his disciples about the consequences of excluding others from doing good works in Jesus' name. To be sure, there is something for us to learn about our own faith life but it's very much about the disciples in this *particular* situation. And here he is telling them "Hey, if you're going to stop other people from healing and bringing others closer to God through me then you are in for serious trouble". This is why he speaks of the dangers of causing the little ones to stumble and implores them to be at peace with one another. Jesus' ultimate concern is building the community or kingdom of God.

But if the disciples disobey Jesus because they are so consumed with their own power, then they will allow evil and division to flourish. Thus, they will be moving further away from the Kingdom of God and toward hell. The word 'hell' in this story is translated from the word Gehenna, a real place outside Jerusalem, the Valley of Hinnom. It was historically associated with child sacrifices and later used as a garbage dump where fires constantly burned. So, when Jesus speaks of being thrown into hell he is once again deliberately using extreme but symbolic imagery. It symbolizes the opposite of God's kingdom, a place where conflict and destruction reign. There is no supernatural place of eternal punishment. Hell represents how far creation chooses to stray from the creator's love.

But whatever we believe about the nature of hell, we cannot save ourselves separate from God. We need his intervention to not only rescue us but transform us. Such is the power of God to turn evil to good that the fires of hell can become a purifying fire. The book of Malachi describes God's judgement as like a refiner's fire. Peter in his first letter talks about faith being like gold that is tested in fire. In this sense the purpose of judgement is not to condemn but to transform. Though

hell is never something to be desired, God can transform even hell into a journey toward redemption.

And God does this through his son Jesus Christ. The Psalms, despite being Jewish texts found in our Old testament, point us in this direction. Psalm 124, which we heard today, is one of the songs of ascent. They are called this because they were likely sung by Israelites in their pilgrimages up to Jerusalem at the three annual Jewish festivals of the time. The opportunity is taken in this psalm to revisit Israel's history and give thanks for the protection and rescue of the Lord. We read

*if it had not been the LORD who was on our side,  
when our enemies attacked us,  
then they would have swallowed us up alive,  
when their anger was kindled against us;  
then the flood would have swept us away;*

This is very likely a reference to the story in Exodus when the Israelites were delivered out of slavery and across the red sea with the Egyptians in hot pursuit . The Lord here is Yahweh, the Jewish God. As Christians we can respect that Jews read this text differently to us while at the same time reading back into it what Jesus has done for us. We are celebrating how Jesus as our Lord and promised Messiah rescues us from the enemy. But in Christ's vision the enemy is evil itself, conceived of as demons that need to be exorcised from the suffering community. Christ's saving action can also be seen in verses 7 and 8 where we read :

*We have escaped like a bird  
from the snare of the hunters;  
the snare is broken,  
and we have escaped.  
Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.*

We have escaped the snare of evil because of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is our rescuer who defeats sin and death and reconciles all things to himself. And this is where we come to Peter's letter. This is not part of this week's lectionary, but I have added it in because I believe it beautifully encapsulates the gospel message.

Peter implores his readers to have a unity of spirit, love for one another, a tender heart and a humble mind. This accords with Jesus' teaching in our reading from Mark to be at peace with one another. Peter proclaims the salvation of Jesus in that remarkable verse 18: "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God." Wow. Christ suffered for sins once for all to unite us with God for eternity.

Peter also writes 'He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison'. You might remember in the Apostle's Creed, we are told that Jesus 'descended to the dead'. Some traditions say 'descended to hell'. This is the same Jesus who warned about the unquenchable fires of hell in our reading from Mark. He takes those imprisoned in hell by the hand and brings them up with him in his resurrection. In John 12:32 Jesus says "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." All people. Jesus Christ will go as far as the depths of hell to reconcile all of us to God. This is exactly what leads Paul to declare that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

So, in the reading from Mark's Gospel, we see that the harsh warnings are not about punishment, but about the urgency of turning away from division and evil, so that we can live into the reality of God's Kingdom. The gospel as a whole is clear-sighted, hopeful and liberating beyond our wildest dreams. It never denies the struggle and the suffering that are part of the human condition, but it promises that we are held eternally in God. Christ delivers us from evil, not to the extent that evil no longer exists, but in the promise that God ultimately prevails over it.

I will leave the final word to Lauren Daigle, an American Christian singer who I have the good fortune to be seeing in concert in Melbourne in a few weeks time. These are lyrics from her song 'Rescue' which captures the heart of today's message: that no matter how deep we've gone into suffering, God's rescue is always at hand. She sings:



You are not hidden  
There's never been a moment  
You were forgotten  
You are not hopeless  
Though you have been broken  
Your innocence stolen

I hear you whisper underneath your breath  
I hear your SOS, your SOS

I will send out an army to find you  
In the middle of the darkest night  
It's true, I will rescue you

There is no distance  
That cannot be covered  
Over and over  
You're not defenseless  
I'll be your shelter  
I'll be your armor

I hear the whisper underneath your breath  
I hear you whisper, you have nothing left

I will send out an army to find you  
In the middle of the darkest night  
It's true, I will rescue you  
I will never stop marching to reach you  
In the middle of the hardest fight  
It's true, I will rescue you

Oh, I will rescue you

**Amen**

## **AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We believe in God,  
creator of all,  
whose love is more  
than mind can measure or time contain.**

**We believe that God's desire  
is fullness of life for all,  
and from the heights of heaven  
to the depths of hell,  
nothing and no one has fallen  
beyond the reach of God's mercy.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ,  
who unveiled the divinity of human flesh  
and revealed to us the nature of God;  
who embodied God's holy wisdom  
and brought forth fruits of love, joy, peace,  
goodness, faithfulness and humility.**

We believe in the way of the cross,  
for when Christ embraced the outcasts  
and unmasked the arrogant,  
he stirred into deadly confrontation  
the power of love and the love of power.  
The enemies of life had their way with him,  
tearing spirit from flesh,  
but God's saving power raised him to life,  
so that we and every person on earth  
might follow him into the fullness of life which death cannot overcome.

We believe in the Holy Spirit  
God's ceaseless and mysterious Go-between,  
who kindles the fires of passion and integrity.  
Elusive and uncontrollable,  
comforting and disturbing,  
she purges our delusions with fire  
and whispers grace with a lover's breath,  
empowering us to refuse what is evil,  
and be taken up with praise.

Though sometimes fearful,  
in God we trust.  
We lay ourselves open to the Spirit's touch  
that we might be the body of Christ,  
offering our life for the life of the world,  
and being drawn into the mysterious dance of the Trinity,  
through Jesus Christ,  
to whom be glory and praise forever.

## **HYMN 152 – ‘Joyful joyful, we adore you’**

1. Joyful, joyful, we adore You,  
God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flowers before You,  
Opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;  
Drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness,  
Fill us with the light of day!
2. All Your works with joy surround You,  
Earth and heav'n reflect Your rays,  
Stars and angels sing around You,  
Center of unbroken praise;  
Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
Flowery meadow, flashing sea,  
Chanting bird and flowing fountain  
Praising You eternally!
3. You are giving and forgiving,  
Ever blessing, ever blest,  
Well-spring of the joy of living,  
Ocean-depth of happy rest!  
You our Father, Christ our Brother,

All are yours who live in love;  
Teach us how to love each other,  
Lift us to your joy above.

## 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.*

**Let us prayer**

O God, you have taught your people to pray to you in times of sorrow and in times of joy: hear our prayers for your world and for your church.

We pray for creation, the heavens and the earth that you have created: for the unique and wonderful treasures of this ancient land; for all creatures and environments endangered by human cruelty and greed; for all who work for the preservation of the earth. O God, our help, rescue us from our complacency and rapaciousness towards your creation and teach us instead to live in harmony with the environment and other species.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all people, for our sisters and brothers of every land: for those suffering in war-torn places such as Ukraine, Palestine and Lebanon; for those without food, water, shelter or livelihood; for those stolen from their homes, their families, their land; for leaders of tribes and nations and all who work for peace and justice. O God, our help, rescue us from the desire for ever-increasing power and control and teach us instead to live in peace and harmony with one another.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for this community, for those with whom we share our lives: for this congregation and all associated with it; for our families, our friends, our neighbours; for those who are doing it tough in these tight financial times and for those voluntary workers, service clubs and welfare agencies who help them stay afloat. O God our help, rescue us from self-centredness and teach us to value and care for all members of our community.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those in need, for the sick and for the suffering: for those who are in pain, confusion, fear or despair; for those seeking asylum in this land as they escape the terrors of war, prejudice or oppression; for the broken-hearted and all who mourn; for all who bring comfort and hope to others. O God, our help, rescue us from our often, wilful ignorance of the needs of those around us and teach us instead to care tenderly for one another.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves and for all people who find ourselves at times separated from God: for those who have never known or had the opportunity to know God; for those for whom the busyness of life separates them from God; for those for whom tragedy or trauma have undermined their faith in God. O God, our help, remind us again that, through Jesus Christ, you have rescued us from our separation from you and inspire us to live lives that help others to come to know you as Lord and Saviour.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

And now let us join in the prayer Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer – please pray this in whatever version you are most at home with.

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. Thank you for allowing us to give away generously in this offering and in our world, to bless your church, your people and your creation.

Amen

## HYMN 569 – ‘Guide me O my great Redeemer’

1. Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,  
pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty;  
hold me with your powerful hand.  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
feed me now and evermore,  
feed me now and evermore.
2. Open now the crystal fountain,  
whence the healing waters flow.  
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
lead me all my journey through.  
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
Be thou still my strength and shield,  
Be thou still my strength and shield.
3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
bid my anxious fears subside.  
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,  
land me safe on Canaan's side.  
Songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever give to thee,  
I will ever give to thee.

# WORD OF MISSION

Let us proclaim a responsive word of mission.

Go in peace to enjoy and live out your gift of faith.

**Our help is in the name of God who made heaven and earth.**

Fear neither outward foe nor inner temptation

**Our help is in the name of God who made heaven and earth**

Rejoice in your blessings and maintain hope in your adversities.

**Our help is in the name of God who made heaven and earth.**

The inexhaustible grace of Christ crucified, the tireless, eternal love of God,  
who fills our faith with many gifts,

**will be with you this day and for evermore.**

**Amen!**

# 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

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Tuesdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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## NEWS & NOTICES