

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



3 NOVEMBER 2024

PENTECOST 24



'THE LOVE STORY and yours!'

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 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 worship.

I know what you will all be saying – given the Title of the sermon – ‘Love Stories,’ ‘Oh no, the preacher is on about love again!’

Well, yes, the preacher is on about love again but guess what!?! The preacher is on about love because of our two wonderful biblical LOVE STORIES today – Ruth the Moabite, and Jesus on the commandments that are the foundation of all that matters! Both extraordinary LOVE STORIES!

But in case you were planning to go to sleep during the sermon, YOU ARE THE PREACHER today! When you are reading the sermon, I want you to write down your favourite love story and then to share it with friends and family and if you like send a copy to Gary and Di Richter to publish in next month’s PATHFINDER.

I can’t wait to hear your LOVE STORIES! So, put your thinking cap on! NB If you like send it to me (Ron Townsend - email: townserh@gmail.com or 6A Elm Grove McKinnon, Vic, 3204.)

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead,
and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Let us worship God and sing of the one who is love and who meets us here.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

HYMN TiS 727: In the Presence...

PRAYERS OF ADORATION/CONFESSION /PARDON:

ADORATION:

Lord God, Creator of all, we come to praise you. You are the one who made us: made us in your own image: made us little less than yourself: made us male and female: made us in and for love: made us to be together and made us to reflect you in all we do. You are the astonishing Lover-God; One who we can never fully comprehend, yet one who makes us your very own loved children. And we know just how far that love extends.

Incomprehensibly made human in Jesus your Son– you became one of us, lived our life, remained true and faithful despite all of our human treachery and self-righteousness, and died because of that treachery and self-righteousness: yet, You never stopped loving the Father and us with your unquenchable love for us.

We are stunned! Astonished into a state of silent awe!

Bruce Prewer

CONFESSION:

Let us pray a prayer of confession.

Lord, this prayer does not really fit here. We have just acknowledged you as the awesome author of all love, but you know us!

We need to confess

Why?

Because we squander your love!

In all sorts of ways we waste and abuse this most precious gift of your Son, your Love, made whole and complete on that cross on Calvary, and granted to all through your own gracious love for us and for the whole of creation.

Please, please, please, forgive us for our failed, broken, fraudulent, miserable, self righteous, selfish, corrupt, half-hearted, ignorant, disavowing, horrible, self-loathing attempts at and commitment to your love in our lives!

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Christ, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We pray this prayer in the name of Love, your Love, the God of Love.

Amen!

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Sisters and brothers of Jesus, we are not called to live in self-loathing and brokenness and self-righteousness. In Christ we are called to embrace the heart of the universe: eternal LOVE: the God who is Love. When God forgives you, you are irrevocably forgiven on earth and in heaven!

Your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: *Robyn Mulder*

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

A light to our path

RUTH 1:1-18

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.

²The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah.

They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten

years, ⁵both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. ⁷So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” ¹¹But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.” ¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” ¹⁶But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” ¹⁸When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

MARK 12:28-34

²⁸One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?”

²⁹Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³²Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; ³³and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

HYMN TiS 417 – Loving Spirit

PREACHING OF THE WORD: - ‘Stories of Love and Loyalty’

Yes folks – LOVE STORIES!

And as I said - the microphone is yours!

But first a love story that touched me deeply at the time and still does so – a real one!

In Sarajevo during the terrible Bosnian war between the Serbs and Croatians (Supposedly one lot Christians and the other lot Muslims) terrible, terrible things happened – I'm not going to share much of the horror and brutal conflict, just a love story that happened amid that hell on earth.

A story that demonstrated the power and wonder of love even in a shocking war zone. (The problem is I can barely remember any of the detail.) But the story still haunts me and at the same time lifts me high.

A young Christian man – a Serb – fell in love with a young Muslim woman - a Croat. (I hope I have that the right way around!) They kept their love secret because it was impossible and strictly forbidden for such a liaison to happen. But clandestinely they met, to be with each other, usually in the dead of night.

There were snipers from both sides actively looking for targets and on one night when the couple were meeting, a sniper shot the young man. As he lay writhing on the ground near where he was to have met his lover, the young woman ran across open space, exposing herself to the snipers, to where he was lying and threw her body over his to try and hold him and protect him. As the bullets reigned down upon them, they died together in love, arms wrapped around each other.

The strange thing is that this devastating love story gained the attention of the world press at the time and video of the incident went viral. Yes, people were outraged at the brutality of their deaths but there were also remarkable outpourings of love and compassion and many, many people calling for peace and an end to the war.

A little later, I want to share a short personal reflection on love related to our biblical stories from today, particularly the remarkable story of Ruth.

BUT now is the time for you to WRITE DOWN YOUR FAVOURITE LOVE STORY, maybe or maybe not with a connection to loyalty, such as Ruth's – OR maybe, a husband-and-wife love story, or a parent's love of their child, or vice versa, or a love story you read or one you saw in a film. Whatever!

*****TIME TO WRITE YOUR FAVOURITE LOVE STORY!*****

I can't wait to hear your LOVE STORIES! So, put your thinking cap on! NB If you like, send it to me (Ron Townsend - email: townerh@gmail.com or 6A Elm Grove McKinnon, Vic, 3204.) And I'll pass it on!

*****TIME TO WRITE YOUR FAVOURITE LOVE STORY!*****

MY RUTH STORY

I was the associate minister in my first settlement at Colac-Cororooke. Rev John Holden was the minister.

Mardie was pregnant with our first child.

It was Friday night, the 25th of April 1975 and I was supposed to be at St Andrew's, Colac, to conduct the rehearsal for what turned out to be, the 'Wedding from Hell' – but back to that in a minute.

Instead, I was at the Colac hospital in the midwifery delivery room, with Mardie, who was threatening to give birth 6 weeks early.

After a relatively short labour, Ruth arrived!

I loved Ruth's birth – I loved/love Ruth – I loved my beautiful wife who had been heroic in giving birth to Ruth. (I did briefly, at that point, thank God that I was not a woman!!)
There was a lot of love there. A lot of sacrificial love there. There still is!
At the wedding next day I preached on Love, of course: Ruths (plural) and love: Ruth Caroline Townsend, my daughter and Ruth the Moabite, daughter-in-law of Naomi.
The wedding went well and the page boy and the flower girl were great for the first 5 minutes (I had been warned by my colleague who conducted the wedding practice that they might be a 'little troublesome!') but they got bored, left their stations and cut loose: that is, played chasey around the choir stalls, invaded the pulpit, threw hymn books at each other and their parents tried to catch them but to no avail!
After the service the married couple thanked me for my, (and I quote) 'powerful, passionate and persuasive words about love: their love in marriage, the love of the Ruths and the astonishing love of God in all our loves.'
They also apologised for the antics of the flower girl and the page boy to which I said something like, 'what antics?!'
Our Ruth was named after Ruth the Moabite from this OT parable about love.
And I am pleased to say that she is a very loving and loyal soul just like her namesake.

In Mark's Gospel that SCRIBE directed us to the heart and soul of faith when he asked of Jesus...

"Which commandment is the first of all?"²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;'³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'³² There is no other commandment greater than these."

Jesus loved the Lord God, his Father, with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and his neighbour as himself

PURE LOVE in human flesh!

AND THAT'S ALL THE GRACIOUS GOD of us all desired! One who lived love, one who would love him and love all his children, no matter what!

And there it was: his own Son.

And the pain and loss and grief of God at the needless murder of his own Son is cast into the outer darkness and replaced, instead, with God's outrageous pouring out of love on his ever-faithful and ever-loving Son, raising him and, and, folks, and all his creation to new life founded on love!

And what can we say!?! other than Hallelujah, Praise God! The only God! The God of grace, but supremely the God of love! The God who re-creates us in his own image – the image and substance of love! Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah! Keep loving! Amen

HYMN TiS 630: The Law of Love

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: Prepared by Marg Davis

"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.

We give thanks for the book of Ruth, in the Old Testament, which was written in a male-dominated culture where women had few rights and where they were disenfranchised without their husbands. We are grateful for this early heroine, who understood, and demonstrated, commitment, love, loyalty, and faithfulness.

Let us pray

Loving God as we bring our prayers before you today, we give thanks for our blessings and for the love of family and friends

We pray for your church in Australia and throughout the world and we ask that you guide us to be open to your spirit of truth, so that we may live our lives in your grace and mercy.

We give thanks for all those who have gone before us in the faith - those who have lived for justice and spoken the truth.

We give thanks for the ones who cared for, and guided, us as we grew, who walked alongside us and picked us up when we stumbled.

We ask for your care of our precious world, which is so divided.

We pray for peace in places where people are suffering, where many are shamelessly killing others, especially innocent people, including women and children.

We pray that world-wide leaders put the needs of the common good ahead of their own personal gratification and especially we pray that American citizens carefully consider their vote in the presidential election.

We pray for all in positions of authority across the levels of government of our country and we hope that they govern wisely, and justly, so that all may live in peace and safety.

We think of our indigenous brothers and sisters and pray that together we can build a more cohesive society and be as one - based on respect, understanding and compassion.

We pray for refugees and asylum seekers and ask that you bring them comfort in their insecurity, peace in their distress and hope in their desolation.

God of constant presence we pray for our families, neighbours, friends and strangers.

We hold before you all who are broken, hurt, lost, lonely, sick, bereaved and struggling.

Help us to reach out with your healing, holding hands, uniting us for the common good.

Guide us, O God, by your Holy Spirit, that all of our prayers, and our lives, may serve your will and show your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Reference: Richard Einerson: Prayers of The People

Now let us join in the prayer our Lord taught us to pray together

**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.**

HYMN TIS 455 – For all the SAINTS.

BLESSING/DISMISSAL

Fed by the bread of life, go out to love God's world.

Go in peace.

And may the blessing of God
who is the SOURCE of all LOVE, who is the BREAD who truly nourishes and who is the
BREATH of life:
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.

WORD OF MISSION:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. 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: Rev Ron Townsend
Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office
Tuesdays, 9.30am-2.30pm
Thursdays, 9.30am-2.30pm
Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm
Phone: 0411 958 127

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

NEWS & NOTICES