

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



17 NOVEMBER 2024

PENTECOST 26

THE BIBLE IS CLEAR: Moabites are bad. They were not to be allowed to dwell among God's people (Dt. 23).
BUT THEN comes the story of "Ruth the Moabite," which challenges the prejudice against Moabites.

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THE BIBLE IS CLEAR: People from Uz are evil (Jer. 25).
BUT THEN comes the story of Job, a man from Uz who was the "most blameless man on earth."

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THE BIBLE IS CLEAR: No foreigners or eunuchs allowed (Dt. 23).

BUT THEN comes the story of an African eunuch welcomed into the church (Acts 8).

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THE BIBLE IS CLEAR: God's people hated Samaritans.
BUT THEN Jesus tells a story that shows not all Samaritans were bad.

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THE STORY MAY BEGIN with prejudice, discrimination, & animosity, but the Spirit moves God's people towards openness, welcome, inclusion, acceptance, & affirmation.

WORSHIP AT HOME

With the Scattered Community

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.

Focusing ... As we pause to contemplate this ongoing season after Pentecost we hear of and are invited to name our own experiences of the generous grace and mercy given for the whole creation, the richness of life unearned and undeserved. In the quietness and stillness of this time, be grateful to the loving creator/parent, who faithfully travels with us through the storms of our lives, especially when we feel alone, confused and despair.

Acknowledgement of Country: We come to meet today from all manner of places, and on the Country of diverse Clans and Nations of First Peoples', and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging, and commit ourselves afresh to the journey of justice and reconciliation.

Joining the scattered community

Here, with the community gathered on Sunday, we enter another week, weaving together the fabric of our lives, in all their different textures and colours, their changing forms and flows. Here we mark the things that have gone before and look forward in hope for newness to come. Here we celebrate each other's place as one thread in the weaving and cherish the moments when the fabric of our lives become whole.

Music as we gather, meet one another & prepare for worship.

Please stand if you are able as the Bible is brought in & the Candle is lit.

Acknowledgement of Country

Greeting & welcome

The peace of God be with you all - And also with you!

Call to Worship

As the new day comes, so too does the invitation and welcome of God.

And we respond to that invitation, confident we are welcome.

Christ Jesus gathers us into one community of faith across time and around the world.

And we are made one in faith and in hope, God's people in this time and place.

God's Spirit meets us here.

We are invited, we are gathered, we are welcome!

Let us worship God!

Hymn/Song – (Together In Song) 111 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty ...

Prayers of praise & thanksgiving followed by our **confession**,

Thank you, God, for our connection into community:
for deep, and fleeting, friendships, for those conversations late at night, for the vulnerable intensity lubricated by laughter, for the freedom to serve others, and to affirm ourselves in the face of all that you know, and we know of our lives.

And we thank you for any signs that the churches with which so many are disaffected can yet be your body on earth as the community of creation.

Thanks be to you, God known in a body who blessed as he lived, who raised up poor lives to be gathered as one, reaching out for the kingdom.

Even as we celebrate your generosity ... forgive us when we forget the gift in our every breath, the care that sustains our every moment, the grace which can transform our every day. Set us free from the prison of grudging hearts, mean desires, resentful spirits, give us courage to act with justice and generosity, and draw us into love that does not calculate or keep scores.

... Silent reflection ...

“Hear the word of gracious forgiveness and promise ... your sins are forgiven!”

Amen! Thanks be to God!

A Time for Listening

First Reading from the Bible – Read by Heather Baxter

Lord, your word is a lamp for our feet, a light for our path!

1 Samuel 1.4-20 & 1 Samuel 2.1-10

Introduction: When my late wife, Shirley, was studying to become a mid-wife, she told me about the stages of labour, the birthing of the infant. I can remember one of those stages from watching our daughter Leanne give birth to grandson James.

There is a time in that process of being born when there is a change that can be terrifying because it is quite unpredictable. It is called ‘transition’ and marks the movement from labour (the very strong pains of getting ready) to the beginning of the actual birth (the coming of the baby or babies). and from what I witnessed that day with Leanne and James, “transitions” are vastly different from what happened before and the peace and delight and rest that followed. This was a time for INVOLVEMENT!

In the same way, the bible stories use the image of giving birth to speak of the coming of God’s promises, God’s rule of peace and justice. But before it actually happens there will be a time of transition in which it will seem like everything we have known and struggled with is ending.

Our readings from the Bible this morning all come from times of “transition” – when one way of living life and relating to one another was changing to something quite different.

In the first of our stories the Hebrew people are moving from being a rather weak group of different tribes and family groups who are threatened by more powerful political groups around them to an established nation with one recognised ruler. As they make this move, the people experience a whole new time being born. The beginning on this new time is marked with the birth of a child, an unexpected child, a child who is promised a gift) and then given back.

Two of the stories we will listen to today are from another Bible book with a person’s name on it - Samuel. They are stories that include the birth of a child. They are stories about transition times - times of moving from one way of understanding things and doing things to a different way of understanding and doing/being.

In ancient lands, and even today, some people see having children as so normal that **not** to have any is some kind of punishment, failure or disgrace. That is how it was for Hannah, the mum in this story. The change for Hannah through her stubborn spirit, is a sign of the transition that is about to happen for her people. Listen for her stubbornness (or as a friend once called it – determination) in the first reading from Samuel.

The second reading from Samuel is a war song – well it has lots of references to war and warriors in it. What has been unbalanced is made right. In ancient times women often sang songs of victory, of joy in the unexpected overcoming of fear and loss. Like Miriam and Deborah, mothers of Israel before her, Hannah sings of God’s power in times of transition – listen for that in Hannah’s song, see if you can recall another Bible song that echoes it?

(Magnificat – Mary – Luke 1)

1 Samuel 1.4-20 and 1 Samuel 2.1-10

⁴ On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters, ⁵ but to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. ⁶ Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. ⁷ So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. ⁸ Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

⁹ After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. ¹⁰ She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. ¹¹ She made this vow: “O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.”

¹² As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. ¹⁴ So Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.” ¹⁵ But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. ¹⁶ Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.” ¹⁷ Then Eli answered, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.” ¹⁸ And she said, “Let your servant find favour in your sight.” Then the woman went her way and ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

¹⁹ They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. ²⁰ In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the Lord.”

2.1-10 Hannah prayed and said,

“My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God.
My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your victory.

² There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. ³ Talk no more so very proudly; let not arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. ⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. ⁵ Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.

⁶ The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. ⁷ The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low; he also exalts. ⁸ He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the

needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world.

⁹ He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked will perish in darkness, for not by might does one prevail.¹⁰ The Lord! His adversaries will be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed."

Second Reading from the Bible – Gospel of Mark 13.1-8

Introduction: As we heard in our first readings, this change-time, 'transition', is really unexpected, it is filled with the most unexpected happenings, the most contradictory things. Our Gospel reading for today is an example of another "transition" time – the time between God's promise of a new way of being and living (the reign of god) and its completion.

Some people here have stood on the site of this story. You have seen and touched the very things spoken of here – the stones on which Herod's temple was built. You have stood and seen this place as people explained to you about the beauty and majesty of that building in Jesus' time - its marble and gold, its size, its architectural wonder and magnificence.

(Any memories, images comments about the place or the experience?)

So that is the place – listen to what happens ...

Mark 13.1-8 - The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

13 As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"² Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,⁴ "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"⁵ Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

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Hymn/Song: (TiS) 429 Break now the bread of life

Prayer before the Word – Revd Dr. Tony Floyd

Preaching – Revd Dr. Tony Floyd

So Jesus encourages his first disciples through a time of transition, that time between the promises and their fulfillment. That time referred to in the Basis of Union of this Uniting Church as "on the way to God's promised end." Yes, we live in a time of transition, all is not yet as God has planned or promised, but look around you, see the signs, sing the songs, enter into this time of transition in joyous anticipation of what is to be fulfilled – and live as if it is so.

A story, I did not write or invent it, it is based on an old Jewish story called *The Rabbi's gift*.

Once upon a time there was a church where things weren't going very well. God's loving Spirit didn't seem to be anywhere. When people came to church, nobody smiled or said hello.

The children only came to church if there were treats afterward.

The youth came only because they were told to.

The adults came only because it made them look good in the community.

Seniors came only out of habit, because they always had.

Sunday school was boring.

There was no youth group.

The Bible study group had only a few members.

No one bothered to help with special events or visitations or mission projects.

People argued and talked about each other in secret.

The minister(s) felt overwhelmed and uninspired.

And the church was so in debt, there was a serious problem with maintenance and upkeep.

Then one Sunday, the church had a guest speaker who had some startling news. "Please believe me when I tell you that the one sent by God is here—among us—right here, now, in this church. Look around you. God's beloved is here—the one we have all been waiting for—the mother's child who is to come."

The people were shocked and amazed. Could it really be true? God's beloved is among us! One of us is the one sent by God!

Who could it be? Every one of us is a mother's child!

They looked around.

Was it the minister? Was it Mrs. P? Was it Mr. M? Was it B? Was it S?

Am I the one?

Over the next few weeks and months, the guest speaker's message had an amazing effect. People began looking at one another differently. They began treating each other with respect on the off chance that one of them might be the one sent by God.

Not only that, but they also began acting with much more self-respect and dignity themselves on the off chance they might be the one.

A whole new feeling of warmth and purpose grew in the community.

People smiled a lot and warmly greeted each other.

People began to come to church eagerly.

The church thrived and grew.

The Spirit breathed new life into them, and they became a vibrant community of love and service.

God's beloved was there...

Christ was definitely in their midst!

(An adaptation of The Rabbi's Gift, a story by Francis Dorff).

As Martin Luther King Jr. said just days before his assassination:

"We shall overcome because the arc of a moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. We shall overcome because Carlyle is right – no lie can live forever. We shall overcome because William Bryant is right – truth crushed to earth will rise again. With this faith we shall be able to hew the stone of hope out of the mountain of despair."

As happened totally unexpectedly in just 10 years –

- The demolition of the Berlin Wall (1989),
- The release of Nelson Mandela and ending of Apartheid (early 90's)
- The ending of the Suharto regime in Indonesia (1998)

According to the Gospel of Mark and Hannah's song ... somehow, it seems to depend on what we expect:

from the least of these ...

from each other ...

from God!

And then - on what we offer from all of that ... !!! (Revd Dr Tony Floyd)

A TIME FOR RESPONDING

Hymn/Song: (TiS) 597 Master, speak, thy servant heareth

(Offering of money, food & ourselves – Let us give as those who have received.)

Announcements

Prayers of the people – David Northwood

"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

Lord help us to preserve a generosity of heart and a nobility of spirit

Today, for some people there is alarm.

For some people there is sickness.

For some there is even death.

But,

They say that many people are still leading lives of quiet contemplation, enjoying their families and the sea breeze in the morning. Some are listening to the birds again.

Some are looking at the sky which is blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other in the early morning
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
is offering free meals and delivery to the housebounds.

They say that there is a church in Ormond where neighbours and supporters are offering free food to others in need.

They say that there is a bakery in the area offering bread to those in need.

Today churches, synagogues, mosques and temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary.

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting.

And are looking at their neighbors in a new way.

All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how small we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.

So we pray and we remember that

Yes there may still be fear.
But there does not have to be hate.

Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.

Yes there is acquisition of baubles and trinkets.
But there does not have to be meanness.

Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul

Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are still singing

The sky is clear,
Spring has come,

And we are always encompassed by Love.

Open the windows of our souls to all the good things that we have been given.

Amen

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.

A TIME FOR LEAVE-TAKING & SCATTERING

Hymn/Song: (S) 691 Faith will not grow ...

Blessing – Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord ... in the name of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Amen! Amen! 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 Dr Tony Floyd

Music: Karen Roberts

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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NEWS & NOTICES