

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



8 DECEMBER 2024

ADVENT 2



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. **You may have a small collection of candles to light, one by one, these Sundays leading up to Christmas. Today we light 2 candles – Hope and Peace***

Peace: *Peace in this world; Peace in our hearts; Peace in our minds; Peace in our souls. Bring peace, God - Incarnate as Christ, present as Spirit, Creator of all. Make peace throughout the world. May we work for peace.*

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.

Call to Worship: Once Advent candles were lit in the middle of winter to remind people of the coming of Christ, light of the world, overcoming its darkness and death. They were lit in the northern winter, that season when the world was getting darker and darker. Now, in the middle of the Australian summer, we light them as signs of hope, still reminding us of that 'other' darkness – broken lives, lost hope, longing for justice and peace where there is none. Today we light the second of this season's Advent candles. Come let us worship the God who comes!

Advent candle 2 - PEACE

The prophet Malachi calls us to watch for the messenger God will send us, a messenger who burns with a passion for God's coming salvation. "For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness" (Malachi 3:2b-3).

In a world driven by a passion to maintain the status quo, we choose to live with a passion for God's peace, to listen to those who call us to righteousness, and to submit ourselves to God's grace, that we might be refined and purified until we reflect God's love throughout the earth.

We light this candle of peace as a sign of our commitment to passionately pursue the work of making peace in our hearts, our families, our communities, and throughout the earth until God's kin-dom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

Light the second candle of the Advent wreath. SING v1 and 2 of CANDLE OF HOPE

1. The candle of hope we light in this hour
proclaims that the Lord is coming in power.
We wait for a future, now hidden from view,
when Christ in his glory will make all things new.

2. The candle of peace shines bright with God's plan
The wolf will lie down and dwell with the lamb
Our guns and our weapons, our hatred and war,
Will give way to gardens that heal and restore.

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Prayers of praise and thanksgiving followed by our **confession**, an assurance of the promise of God's loving forgiveness

Prayer for today God of peace, you bring peace to a troubled world, you bring peace to troubled hearts, you bring peace to our past, you our present and to our future.

You are the great reconciler. Your love binds up the broken world. Your peace heals. Your joy fills our minds and hearts.

You never stop loving us. You never give up on us. You never fail or falter. We live in a world flooded with your light and love and for this we give thanks.

(Words for Worship 20221120)

Gracious God, forgive us when we do not spend enough time with you for the self-care of our soul. When we undermine the value of the other person and overlook those who are already neglected. When we cannot cry with the crying and do not have empathy, tears to shed for the oppressed.

When we fail to acknowledge the power of our own daily struggles.

When we let the sun set without raising a single word of thanks.

When we fail to see your beauty every morning.

When we fail to shepherd your sheep in the right direction for food, water, shelter, and security that they need each day.

When we hold on to the undeserved success bestowed upon us.

When we cannot let go of the string of past hurting and harm done to us.

When we are not bold enough to invite the unchurched friends to come to your holy sanctuary.

When we are not aware enough to say, "Hello" when we meet you in your children on the street.

Thank you God, for not counting our sins against us, and for forgiving us through the forgiving prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Fig Tree Worship Resource, Gippsland Presbytery. 20221120)

Assurance of Forgiveness: (based on Col 1:19,20): In Christ we see the image of the invisible God. All the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him and through him all things – whether on earth or on heaven, are reconciled to God And for this we say – **Thanks be to God!**

THE LISTENING TIME

Readings from the Bible (Intro – Tony F)

The Bible is a book of the imagination. If it were not, how could it speak of angels, expectant virgins, and songs in the night and messages through dreams? And if we are to be rational, thoughtful, analytical, then we should be sceptical about all these things. Walter Brueggemann says that Scripture “funds the imagination.” and Advent is a wonderful time to “fund the imagination” from Bible stories. So listen with your minds and imaginations as the stories for today are read to us – listen for the Word of God!

Your word is a lamp to our feet – **a light for our path!**

The prophet called Malachi 3.1-4 (Suzie) - See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner’s fire and like washers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years.

Luke 1.68-79 - “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty saviour for us in the house of his child David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

Because of the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

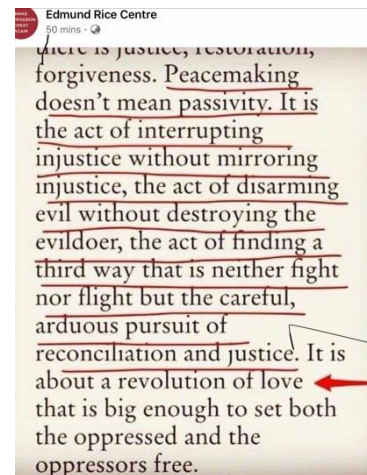
And Luke 3.1-6 - In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. John went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth,
⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”



Hymn/Song – (TiS) 158 God has spoken by his prophets

Prayer before the Word – Revd Dr. Tony Floyd

For reflection – Revd Dr. Tony Floyd

“In the time of...” so begins this pericope of the Good News by Luke.

NOT anytime ... ONCE UPON A TIME!

NOT in yet to be lived time - sometime.

But specific time ... “In the time of...” ... time with a context, a place, people. Time in relation to every succeeding generation.

Looking to another time to provide answers and experiences we do not know and cannot experience for ourselves . . . that is familiar to all of us. In a recent documentary on the River Thames in Britain, speakers on the program spoke of how time is divided into “before the war” and “after the war”, and “before the flood” and “after the flood”. Time located, marked, signified!

Some of those looks are to “anytime” ... There must be a time, anytime, once-upon-a-time, when ... and we look back, we sentimentalise, we idealise, and our glasses for seeing become more and more rose coloured. And we find solace that was never intended in the cry “Tell me the old, old story...!” Then that story-telling remains a telling but never has any sense of participation, except in the longing to go back to it as we remember it. Such a story never becomes a ‘story-making’, because all that is evoked, recalled is someone else’s telling, someone else’s story, some other time.

And **today**, we live in such a time.

Today, this second Sunday in Advent confronts us again with the persistent and insistent invitations to remember, to prepare and to be ready.

Today, we are again at that tempting place where the **combination** of the telling and retelling of the stories of ministry **and** of Advent’s invitations can draw us into a kind of static discipleship and sentimentality. This then ensures that the Christmases we remember “then” remain the benchmark, and the stories, those old, old, familiar stories remain ‘out there’, rather than becoming that most disturbing of realities - in here!

Today we listen to that story *“In the time of...”*.

Today we are invited to tell together the story of our faith in such a way that it is not only the telling and anticipating, but it is also the making of story.

And such an invitation is the invitation of every Advent, that we listen **and** tell **and** enter **and** make the story in such ways that we can regard ourselves as included in it: **that** story becomes **our** Story - and we know it to be so. It is, as Ross Snyder once wrote, like

“... jumping in and swimming, even when we know there are sharks in the water”.

People say: “face the facts” - Advent causes us to wonder. People want to reassure us about all sorts of things – Advent can cause us to be less sure. It is an appropriate Advent prayer that this time shall be one of exploration and expectation; a time of story-listening and story-making so that in the ministry we share together ‘all flesh shall see the salvation of God!’

A poor woman called Mary, pregnant, goes off with her de-facto husband and breaks into song. A baby cries in a barn and Herod the King gets very nervous – in those imaginative stories. It is an

appropriate Advent prayer and hope that this time will not be a pause, a time for **sometime stories and memories** seen through ever more rosy glasses, nor of **anticipatory stories** where the only reality is yet to come.

Imagine, a whole new world. Imagine, tomorrow not closed but open to the inbreaking of a living God. Imagine, your life caught up in something bigger than any of us. Imagine! It is an appropriate prayer that in this Advent, in our personal lives and in the life of the faith community to which we belong, those who have known faith and those who have not will all have opportunity to know a living God. That this will be a time to discover the Good news that no one is excluded, and no one is unwelcome; to listen to and to make story together as living stones and witnesses... living, discovering, story-making together with anticipatory resoluteness.

“In the time of ...”

TIME FOR RESPONDING

Hymn/song (TiS) 647 Comfort, comfort all my people

(Robin Mann – inspired by Isaiah 40) and Offering during this song

Refrain: Comfort, comfort all my people with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people all your sins are taken away.

Though your tears be a river running, though your tears be an ocean full, though you cry with the hurt of living: comfort, comfort.

Every valley shall be lifted, every mountain shall be low, every rough place shall be smoother: comfort, comfort.

Refrain: Comfort, comfort all my people with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people all your sins are taken away.

Though your eyes see only darkness, though your eyes can see no light, though your eyes see pain and sorrow: comfort, comfort.

Every night will have its morning, every pain will have an end, every burden will be lightened: comfort, comfort.

Refrain: Comfort, comfort all my people with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people all your sins are taken away.

Prayer over offering

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.*

"Peace be within you" the Psalmist says, and so we pray, loving God, for peace in our hearts. We name before You now prayers for ourselves, and for individuals known to us who are anxious, ill, alone, afraid or hurting

"Peace be within you" the Psalmist says, and so we pray, Prince of Peace, for peace in our communities. In the midst of political strife, social upheaval, economic stress and neighbourhood arguments. We name before you those known to us in our local communities who are hurting ...

"Peace be within you" the Psalmist says, and so we pray, Spirit of love, for peace in our world. In the midst of war, angry words, broken homes we pray for all who live in fear.

We name before You situations of war or aggression including the peoples of Ukraine, Russia, Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Sudan and all peoples oppressed in their own countries, homes or neighbourhoods ...

We pray for peace within the governments and institutions of our world – may all decision-makers know the art of compassionate conversation. We pray for calmness and wisdom in our world leaders – may they know the delight of diversity when opinions differ. We name before You leaders and institutions in our world nurturing or needing peace ...

God of love, Prince of Peace, Holy Spirit – We ask you to fill our lives with peace. There is so much uncertainty in our world, yet with your love and guidance we can work together to build a brighter future. Give us the strength to all walk on the same path towards peace.

Amen

Adapted from Church of Scotland Worship Resources:

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/weekly-worship/monthly/2024-december/sunday-8-december-2024-second-sunday-of-advent-year-c>

The Lord's Prayer in whatever version you are most familiar with:

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/Song – (TiS) 611 God of grace and God of glory

(IF YOU ARE ABLE, PLEASE REMAIN STANDING FOR THE BLESSING)

Blessing

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: Rev Dr Tony Floyd

Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES