

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



04 FEBRUARY 2024

EPIPHANY 5



RELEASED FROM - FREED FOR

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 2024. We are looking forward to offering all the support we can to you in 2024 at home – with these worship resources and in any way we can. Actually, if you think of some way in which we can make things better for you at home PLEASE LET US KNOW. Tell the person who delivers these resources to you and/or give Cate at the Office a ring 0411 958 127 or Ron Townsend on 0438 404 104.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

¹Praise the LORD!

How good it is to sing praises to our God;

for he is gracious,

and a song of praise is fitting.

⁷Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;

make melody to our God on the lyre.

⁸He covers the heavens with clouds,

prepares rain for the earth,

makes grass grow on the hills.

the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,

in those who hope in his steadfast love.^{20c}

Praise the LORD! Let us worship our God

Psalm 147: 1, 7, 8, 11, 20c

HYMN TIS 181: Come, O God of all the earth

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION:

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Let us pray.

Lord God, you lift up those we step over in our race to success; you soak our aching feet in the waters of life;

you massage hearts bruised by others.

We praise you, Rebuilder of crumbling souls

You pick those not chosen on the playgrounds of life;

you cover open sores with your grace; you wander our streets, inviting those who huddle in doorways to feast at your Table.

We follow you, Bread of Heaven.

You gather those who are cast aside by a throwaway society, and call them by name; you melt hearts hardened by cynicism, with the warmth of your hope; you energize us so, we can sprint into the kingdom.

We welcome you, Delightful Spirit.

CONFESSION: A Call to Reconciliation

We walk through life, confident, strong, boasting of all our achievements. But God sees the hurts we have inflicted on others, the weariness in our bones from chasing after bad choices, and all the foolishness we trip over in the busyness of life. Let us come to God, for the One who listens to our faltering words is the One who gives us the Word filled with grace and mercy.

FORGIVENESS: Together we pray for Forgiveness

We cannot hide from you, Everlasting God, even if we were to go from one edge of creation to the next. you speak to us of compassion, but the ways in which we treat others show we have not been listening. You explain your hopes to us, and we act as if we don't have a clue as to what is going on. We run as fast, and as far, from you as we can, and wonder why we have no energy to follow Jesus. Yet you search for us in all the deserted places we flee to, Never-wearied God, so you can take us by the hand to show us the way to life with you. You heal our broken hearts so we can offer them to others. You fill us with your strength so we can bind ourselves to Jesus, our Savior, following him to serve all of your children.

Silence is kept

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

Have you not been listening. God never tires out, nor is there a 'use by' date on God's forgiveness. God is ever with us, healing us with mercy, and strengthening us for service.

If God numbers the stars, surely our names are known by the One who loves us and offers us grace. This is indeed good news for all!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers by Thomas Schuman

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD:

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

A light to our path

ISAIAH 40: 21-31:

²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; ²³who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. ²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. ²⁵To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. ²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. ²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God?" ²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even

youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

SONG: Dreams and Visions

1. As a dream receive your history
from the martyrs and the saints.
Let their story be your story,
yours the laughter, yours the pain.

Bridge:

We will rise, we will rise.

Chorus:

*We will rise up on wings like eagles,
run and not be tired.*

Show us your dreams and visions.

Warm our hearts with tongues of fire.

Tongues of fire.

2. Lord, we stumble in the darkness,
we cry for visions in these days.
Pour on us your Living Spirit
in all ways, always.

Bridge:

We will rise, we will rise.

Chorus:

*We will rise up on wings like eagles,
run and not be tired.*

Show us your dreams and visions.

Warm our hearts with tongues of fire.

Tongues of fire.

3. Jesus, save your nomad people,
bring us face to face with you.
Start in us a new creation.
Christ be with us as we go.

Bridge:

We will rise, we will rise.

Chorus:

*We will rise up on wings like eagles,
run and not be tired.*

Show us your dreams and visions.

Warm our hearts with tongues of fire.

Tongues of fire.

Words and music by Andrew Tanner

1 CORINTHIANS 9: 16-23: Suzie Fergusson

¹⁶If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

¹⁹For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

MARK 1: 29-39:

²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. ³²That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

SERMON: Ron Townsend

Here's a question to consider

What are you going to do and be with what you have been given?

I'll repeat that.

What are you going to do and be with what you have been given?

If you give a Christmas present of, say a bike, to a child, you don't expect that the child will put the bike in the shed and never use it – perhaps just polishing it up once a year and admiring the nice clean bike. Is that what the giver expects? Will that help the child to acquire the exhilarating gift cycling offers?

Last week, I remember saying that we don't know what the demon possessed man did with his healed body and mind. I shared:

"Now, we don't know what happened to that man from whom Jesus removed the demon, but I have no doubt whatsoever, that the authority of Jesus himself freed him – gave him life. No more repressive burdensome authority crushing him any longer! Good News! Good News indeed!"

Question is what did the man do with that precious gift of demon-free new life? What did he do?

What do you reckon? Come on, what do you think he might have done with this new freedom, in life, he now possessed?

Contributions (Use a handheld mike)

There is some evidence in the text from Mark's Gospel today, about how folk respond to Jesus' removal of our demons and how folk react to that gift of freedom.

And it has to do with a mother-in-law. Now I know mother in laws get a bad press but what about this one we read of this morning? Peter's mother-in-law.

What happened to her? Healed, made whole, made whole by Jesus,so she could make morning tea for some blokes! Which she did! Healed, made whole, so she could make morning tea for the blokes! Which she did! That does not sound very freeing to me!

Perhaps to let you know what is really going on here I will tell a brief story about Evie, my granddaughter.

As you know, Ruth, my daughter, Jez her husband, Evie, Bella and Ethan, their three children, live with us – and have done so for 2 years, with a year to run. You don't have to be a genius to work out that with 7 of us in the house there is a lot of washing to be done. So, on Wednesday morning Ruth asked me to

show 14 year old Evie how to do the washing. Ruth was taking Bella to her first day of school at Kilvington. So, I set up the first wash showing Evie the various steps. Then when it was time for the second load, I called her into the laundry and asked her to load the 2nd wash and set it going. As she sheepishly handled the various dirty clothes into the washing machine, she mumbled, 'Owwwhhh, When I get married, my husband is going to do all the washing!'

Evie – a modern young women – definitely, a 'me to' young woman! Praise the Lord!

BUT, not a 1st century mother-in-law!

It was a much different world then, and we need to understand that world a little better if we are to grasp what Jesus actually does for Peter's mother-in-law, when he heals her, and why her response is so significant.

Professor Sarah Henrich is an American Lutheran biblical scholar and her description and analysis of what happens in this encounter is written beautifully, I would like to share it with you.

'In the first Century, illness bore a heavy social cost: not only would a person be unable to earn a living or contribute to the well-being of a household, but their ability to take their proper role in the community, to be honored as a valuable member of a household, town, or village, would be taken from them. Peter's mother-in-law is an excellent case in point. It was her calling and her honor to show hospitality to guests in her home. Cut off from that role by an illness, cut her off from doing that which integrated her into her world. Who was she, when no longer able to engage in her calling? Jesus restored her to her social world and brought her back to a life of value, by freeing her from that fever. It is very important to see that healing is about restoration to community and restoration of a calling, a role as well as restoration to life. For life without community and calling is bleak indeed.'

Need I say anymore. When Jesus heals (exorcises demons) it is not about some airy-fairy spiritual pie in the sky healing-it is GROUNDED, it is about being enabled to exercise the real wholeness of life that is gifted to each one of us.

'Jesus frees us not only from things that seek to oppress us, but also for a life of purpose, meaning, and good works. (Yes, good works, not those things that we do in the vain hope of justifying ourselves before God or others, but rather those things that we do as a response to the Gospel to serve our neighbor stemming from a sense of joy, love, and freedom.)' David Lose

Someone said to me last week – oh, not more demons this week!?

Well, yes and no!

The demons, you remember them: hurt, bitterness, addiction, shame, hate, lust, greed, divisions or divisiveness, selfishness, anger, mental ill health, self-righteousness, physical infirmity or illness; these demons will continue to exercise their control over us if we don't accept God's gift of new life, which displaces the power and control of those 'demons' over us.....

AND..... most importantly;

then use, express, make real in our lives, those gifts of new life, in our daily living! RELEASED FROM-FREED FOR! RELEASED FROM-FREED FOR!

Let me finish with some quotes. The first from Frederick Buechner:

"The place God calls you to, is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

That's where Peter's healed mother-in-law went. Released from her illness and freed for. That is, to exercise and serve others using her gift of hospitality in her community. Freed for....

"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness (because of your release from the powers that crush and disarm you) and the world's deep hunger meet."

The 2nd quote is from the Prophet Isaiah: No explanation required, I hope!

²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

And then, St Paul's impassioned declaration about where his healing by Jesus calls him to be (and this is just the concluding part of that declaration.)

²²To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might, by all means, save some.

And the final quote is from that unnamed mother-in-law of Simon Peter:

³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

Let us pray

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.

Let us pray.

We pray for the people who are part of our community who are not here today. In particular today we pray for the people who receive the written service resources each week. As we begin the new year of distribution of the resources we pray that the recipients will find connection to the gathered community and connection to you, Father.

We use Psalm 147 as a basis for this prayer.

Father, we come with heavy hearts as we seek you today.

We pray for those in hospital today.

For those in the poorly resourced hospitals on the edges of battlefronts – in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, Ukraine and Russia. We know that some of these places are also battling the challenging weather conditions of Winter, as well as a lack of medicines and doctors and nurses.

He heals the heartbroken and bandages their wounds.

We pray for those in hospitals dealing with illnesses caused by the mind – those whose minds have been affected by legal and illegal drugs, those struggling with body image problems, those affected by psychoses.

God puts the fallen on their feet again

We pray for the little ones – the children with life threatening illnesses, the early birth babes, the little ones who know more about the inner workings of a hospital than that of the kinder they attend.

He blessed your children among you

We pray for peace and robust dialogue.

Peace in our street

Peace in Ormond

Peace in Victoria and Australia
Peace in the world

**He's not impressed with horsepower;
The size of our muscles means little to him.**

From With Love to the World we read
"The I AM, whose name is a Verb, is a constant Presence moving towards healing and wholeness, even when we can't see it or, feel it. So just wait, God holds us even when we let go."
Amen!

Lord's Prayer. (Please feel free to pray that version you are most familiar 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.

HYMN TiS 607: Make me a Channel

DISMISSAL:

God sends us forth into the world,
so we will walk miles out of our way so as to walk miles in the shoes of others.
Jesus calls us to serve everyone we meet,
so we will become all things to all people.
The Holy Spirit encourages us to let go of our gospel-given rights,
so we may breathe new life into the faint.

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BLESSING:

And may God give you the strength and freedom of an eagle.
May Christ be the bread that nourishes and renews you.
And may the Holy Spirit be the rising wind beneath your wings.
Amen.

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WORD OF MISSION:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen

RECESSIONAL HYMN TiS 779: May the feet of God.

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-1.30pm

Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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NEWS & NOTICES