

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



11 FEBRUARY 2024

TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS



"Partners in Jesus' Mission..."

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.

Focussing ...

From the splash of the stone the ripples move out, wider and wider until they touch the edges: all the edges, and some bounce back. Memories entered and trusted can ripple through our lives, to the edges and sometimes back, and in the ebb and flow memory nurtures hope, becomes living water – gifts of a loving and bountiful God. Thank you God!

Acknowledgement of Country: We come to meet this morning 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 we begin 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 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.

Focussing for worship

Christ be with all who gather today. Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe, and all its peoples.

Call to Worship

Now is the time of the feast. Call in all the people – the oppressed, the hungry, the tired – all who need our company and the loving care of God!

The God of all creation is a generous God. The cup of life is full to overflowing, the bread is gift of food to be shared by all, and the dance of life comes after. Thanks be to God! Let us worship this God in spirit and in truth.

Song (TiS) 186 *Stars and planets flung in orbit*

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

Praise & thanks: Thanks be to you, God, awesomely distant: thanks for the searing of shooting stars, the colours of the planets in the night sky, the space and power beyond our perceiving, which sparkle in the sky of our lives with your caring.

Thanks be to you, God, uncomfortably close: giving life to dead dry things – the dance of pure stillness, the beat of our hearts, is your doing.

Thanks be to you, God, known in a body who blessed as he lived, who raised up our life, to be gathered as one, reaching out for your intended world.

Confession: God of the spirit of kindness, in the glory of earth and sea and stars, in the kaleidoscope of colour and shade and shapeliness, in the patterns of humour and tenderness and touch, we celebrate your generosity.

Forgive us then we forget the gift in our every breath, the care that sustains our every moment, the grace that can transform our every day.

Set us free from the prison of grudging hearts, mean desires, resentful spirits, give us the courage to act with justice and generosity, and draw us into love that does not calculate or keep scores.

Heal us and your grieving, hurting world of all that harms us. By the power of your resurrection restore us to new life, set us on new paths, bring us from darkness to light, help us to choose hope!

Assurance: Jesus says, 'Pick up your bed and walk!' – in and through the grace and love of God we can pick up our bed of sorrows and fears, our bed of grief and sin, our life and brokenness, and know we are beloved, forgiven, healed and whole children of God! **We praise and thank you, God!**

A Time For Listening

Readings from the Bible: Read by Lorraine Denniston

Your Word, God, is a lamp for our feet, a light for our path

Kings 2.1-12: Elijah Ascends to Heaven - Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³ The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

⁴ Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵ The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷ Fifty men of the company of prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and the two of them crossed on dry ground.

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." ¹⁰ He responded, "You have asked a hard thing, yet if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." "As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Mark 9.2-9: The Transfiguration - Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one on earth could brighten them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide

In these readings may we hear the Word of God: thanks be to God!

Song: (TiS) 549 God be in my head

Contemporary Word: “Partners in Jesus’ Mission...” Tony Floyd

“To be a Christian, said Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his letters from prison, is not to be religious – it is just ‘to be’.

Years ago, in his Saturday Reflection in the ‘Age’ newspaper (8/2/97), John Smith wrote:

“A fringe dwelling Jew named Jesus ... embodied the greatest of all ideas. He claimed that by the power of God men and women could be so transformed that they could truly love even their enemies. Now that’s the greatest of all ideas in the history of nations - and no nation has ever embodied or lived that ...”

Mark 9.2-9

Did you know that story? Did you know that the word telling us what happens in this story is the same word that tells us what happens when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly ?

GREEK WORD ↔ ENGLISH WORD

METAMORPHOSIS ↔ TRANSFIGURE = to change appearance, to change what people see. In some cases to change ‘spiritually’ - how we are in our relationships with God.

Underneath both our biblical stories today is a claim that human beings can and do experience the presence of God in their lives. Underneath the imagery of tearing of ones’ own clothing and replacing it with that of a person known to be God’s person, **and** that of a wandering teacher who is touched by something that can only be described as beyond any known bleach, is an experience of a living God!

This experience, as recorded in those stories we name Gospel’s – Good news – is a powerful, life-affirming reality.

This encounter with the living God ‘metamorphosed’ Jesus’ life into a presence of that living God that any human being is invited to know and to claim for their own.

Somehow, in and through the person of Jesus of Nazareth the reality of God has become an experience in human history that is universally available.

It is the gospel claims, the good news for all, that this reality of God is love – love that breaks through every human barrier, that sweeps over every human prejudice.

This story image of ‘transfiguration’, and the accompanying affirming voice shows the reality that no barriers can be erected around the love of God seen in this life of Jesus. It was a terrifying experience that burst through the religious security systems, and it calls for profound changes in the human psyche.

Such love as was to be ‘listened to’ in this life, called for openness, for the radical insecurity of a fully accessible humanity, for the end of human isolation. Such love could not be tolerated – says our story – it had to be eliminated – and in that sense the cross was inevitable.

This story image of ‘transfiguration/metamorphosis’ confronts each of us – minister and people alike – with the reality that if we are claimed by this living God, becoming indeed the Body of Christ, then we too are ‘transfigured’ into that love that is God, that is Christ among us.

If we are ‘transfigured’, then we cannot reject or oppress, or define pejoratively anyone who is a recipient of the overwhelming love of God. And his loving ministry, death and resurrection is, after all, for the world and its peoples. To do so is to deny Christ. To do so is to ‘play’ church.

When the love of God is contained within human barriers, as if life ‘as it is’ is the only truth, it is not life metamorphosed. It is death! Such life is not life in its fullness, for it ceases to be the demanding, searing, opening, healing, transforming love of God. Then it has become what one theologian describes as “*the perfume of human respectability, sprinkled on the cesspools of human negativity.*” (Spong 239)

Such perfume will never last to another generation. A contained, curtailed, domesticated, tamed love of God that is not marked by transfiguration will never lead to the cross of Calvary. Jesus’ life, his ministry and death are the love of God that is to be ‘listened to’, it is the love of God that open us and makes us vulnerable.

By ‘listening’ to this transfigured one, those who followed were to be awakened to a great truth about life and about God. God in Jesus was present to those he engaged!

- He was alive to the woman of the street who interrupted him at dinner in the house of Simon, washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair (Luke 7.36ff).
- He was present to Zachaeus, who climbed the tree simply to see Jesus and ended up hosting him at dinner (Luke 19.2ff).
- Jesus was present to the Samaritan woman at the well who tried to divert the conversation into a theological debate only to discover that Jesus' life could not be diverted (John 4.7ff).
- He was present to the woman who was only confident enough to touch his garment (Luke 8.43ff).
- Jesus was present to the penitent thief and to his grieving mother (John 19.26ff) even as his life ebbed away.

Jesus was alive, totally alive, and in that vibrant, vital life God was to be encountered, experienced, heard.

This power of God's love, this fullness of life offered through Jesus' living and dying, can be met, and known in every age.

- On the edges of human living and struggling, at the boundaries of sense and sensibility.
- Where hurt reigns and darkness abounds, where joy is and healing bursts through.
- Where the innocent still are slaughtered and the mighty generate enough wealth in one day to feed the world's poor, where smiles bring healing and silence creates peace – there God in Jesus is still present.

In this "beloved Son", God is near, God is to be listened to. In this "beloved Son" real life is offered, illustrated, and made real – for all people. As the words of Joshua suggested long ago, there is set before us today life and death - in the name of the living Christ, choose life!

A time for Responding

We sing: (TiS) 234 *How good, Lord, to be here!*

Some of what we do in response to the Good news –
Announcements

Prayers of the People – Prepared by Warwick Barry

Offering of our prayers of concern for others, the world, the church, ourselves ... *Ecumenical Prayers for the world communities* – today we join with the whole church in praying for the lands, people, and governments in Andorra, Italy, Malta, Portugal, San Marino, and Spain

"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.

Holy God,

In the beauty of your created world, we glimpse your glory. It is good, O God, to be in your presence.

We pray for your world:

- where its beauty is disfigured by our careless stewardship;
- where its beauty is broken and bleeding from war;
- where its beauty is diminished by corruption and greed.

Transfigure your world by your presence, O God, and, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

In the shining light of Gospel, we glimpse your glory.

We pray for your church:

- for all who preach your word;
- for all who translate your word;
- for all who minister in your name.

Transfigure your church by your presence, O God, and in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

In the joy and wonder of human love, we glimpse your glory.

We pray for those whose love enriches our lives:
for little children with generous and forgiving hearts;
for those who care for the frail and the sick;
for our families and friends and all relationships that speak to us of you.
Transfigure us by your presence, O God, and, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

In the compassionate heart of Jesus, we glimpse your glory.
We pray for all in need of your compassion and care:
all whose bodies are bruised;
all whose spirits are crushed;
all whose minds are confused;
all whose hearts are broken;
Transfigure their lives with your presence, O God, and, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

In the lives of your saints, we glimpse your glory.
We pray for all who have departed this life and who are now with you.
O God, you summon home your faithful servants. As you gathered up to heaven
your servant Elijah, may you draw us also into the promise of your glory, for it is good,
O God, to be in your presence.
Holy God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Source: Let us Pray - Janet Nelson

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.

A time for Leave-taking

Song (TiS) 468 *We are your people; Spirit of grace*

Blessing

Wherever we go, may the joy of God the gracious overflow us.
Wherever we go, may the face of Christ the kindly shine through us.
Wherever we go, may the compassing of the Spirit of grace embrace others through us.
Wherever we go, the presence of the Trinity around us to bless and keep us in Christ's way.
Go in peace to love and serve God - in the name and power of Christ.

Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

Music and Words reproduced with permission under CCLI licenses

Presider: Rev Dr Tony Floyd

Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-1.30pm

Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm

Phone: 0411 958 127

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

Website: www.ormondunitingchurch.org

NEWS & NOTICES