

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



25 FEBRUARY 2024

LENT 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.

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

WELCOME

INTROIT TIS 78 I was overjoyed

CALL TO WORSHIP

We come to worship God made known in the person of Jesus Christ. Let us put aside the thoughts which distract us, the things which consume our energy, and the dreams which are self-centred. Let us turn our thoughts to the truth in Christ, the things that reflect the love of God, and the dreams inspired by the Holy Spirit.

HYMN TIS 179 Praise with joy the world's creator...

PRAYER OF PRAISE & CONFESSION

God of awe and great mystery, creator of immensity yet lover of the small and fragile, we worship you. Wondrous God, our minds may not grasp your fullness, nor our hearts contain your love, yet we worship you. God of the past, the present and the future, we thank you that you love us faithfully and uniquely. You loved us before we knew anything about you; you care for us in every moment of our lives; you know our deepest thoughts, our highest hopes and our greatest fears; you know the best and the worst in us, and still you love us. Thank you that you never let us go. Through the extraordinary life of Jesus and through the manner of his suffering, death and resurrection we come face to face with the profundity of your love. Thank you for your promises which give us hope for today and tomorrow. God of our past, present and future, receive our thanks and praise which we offer in Jesus' name. Amen (Adapted from the World Day of Prayer 2022).

We confess to you, Lord, what we are: we are not the people we like others to think we are; we are afraid to admit even to ourselves what lies in the depths of our souls. But we do not want to hide our true selves from you. We believe that you know us as we are, yet you still love us. Help us not to shrink from self-knowledge; teach us to respect ourselves for your sake; give us the courage to put our trust in your guiding power and mercy. Raise us out of the paralysis of guilt and fear and take us into the energy of forgiven people. For the sake of Jesus Christ we pray.
Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God is the beginning and the end and is making all things new, even us, who come in need of grace. Let us receive God's grace and know that we are forgiven. And to this we say: **Thanks be to God.**

SHARING THE PEACE

SERVICE OF THE WORD Read by Heather Baxter

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-17

The Covenant of Circumcision

¹⁷ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty^[a]; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram^[b]; your name will be Abraham,^[c] for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." ¹⁵ God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" ¹

Mark 8: 31-38

Jesus Predicts His Death

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

HYMN TIS 453 We limit not the truth of God

SERMON “Turning things upside down”

The Leaky Bucket” from Wisdom Stories from Around the World.....

There was once a beautiful garden of which the gardener was very proud. Every day he would fill up his two buckets and walk along the pathway to the where the flower beds were to water them. Now the two buckets were different... one was bright and shiny new bucket, one was old and dilapidated with long years of service but now past its best. The new bucket was very proud of itself and would never spill a single drop. The old bucket felt ashamed in comparison as it had the odd hole in it and by the time the gardener reached the flower beds it had spilled water along the path. The shiny bucket would often boast to the old bucket about how good he was and would ridicule the old one saying things like “I don’t know why the gardener bothers with you. You’re a waste of space”. “I can only do my best” the old bucket would reply. One day the gardener heard this kind of conversation going on and after watering the flowers as usual... a full bucket from the new and half from the old, he picked up the buckets again and thanked them for their day’s work. “Now I am going to carry you back to the shed, but as we go, I want you to look carefully at the pathway”. As they did they noticed that on the side where the shiny bucket was carried was bare earth, but on the other where the gardener carried the old bucket there was a row of young, fresh, green shoots, which in a few weeks would become a joyous row of wild flowers leading all the way to the garden.

As with all good stories you can make of it what you want but in relation to the reading from Genesis today there is a very real sense in imaging Abraham and Sarah feeling a little like the leaky bucket... very old and well used and wondering very much if ever they would be of use. I mean they had put their feet up... I Abraham was almost 100 and Sarah 90 and here Abraham is told that he and Sarah would become parents of a son. Hey you’ve got to be kidding... is this some kind of joke? Well certainly Abraham thinks so as he falls about laughing. But God of course is pretty serious about this and to show just how serious he is gives Abram a new name and Sarai and new name ... Abraham and Sarah. From you will descend multitudes and multitudes of people, many nations and generations.

You are never too old eh to be of use to God. What a truth to affirm! There is no retirement date for a Christian. As we get older we may not have the energy we once had, perhaps even our commitment gets a bit shaky at times, but every generation in the church needs encouragement and affirmation for their gifts and abilities... and that they can be asked to use them. The leaky bucket had an amazing effect didn’t it watering the plants along the pathway. It didn’t know it either and only when told by the gardener did it realise. Much of our ministries can be like that too and we think that we haven’t done anything. So much so that we can lose confidence and not feel that we have anything to contribute... that is until someone tells us. I am not sure how good we are at affirming one another as Christians, but by gee it makes one heck of a difference when we do affirm someone’s contribution. And no one in a congregation should ever feel they are left out even if the dynamics of social interaction mean that we might not know one another as well as we could. That’s a reality when people don’t see one another that often ... a reality in this past year with COVID. But the future in this respect is hopeful and in due course full church fellowship life will re-establish itself. So we are never too old to contribute.

In relation to the gospel today though, the theme is a bit different isn't it. This is a truly radical passage, one of the most radical and shocking in the New Testament. It turns our thinking about religion completely upside down. The statement by Jesus to his disciples that his ministry will be rejected and face suffering and death must have hit the disciples like a bombshell. They are so shocked that Peter who is so often the fall guy for the disciples decides on their behalf to take Jesus aside and try and put him straight. Jesus of course will have none of it and Peter gets a whack over the ears for trying. Imagine it though from the disciples point of view, they reckon they have been on a pretty good thing. They had given up their livelihoods to follow this man... he had been untried when they first took up his invitation... and so it had been quite a risk for them. But things had gone pretty well ever since. They had seen amazing things, miracles and teachings and had even gone out in ministry themselves. They had heard Jesus being likened to the prophets of old and even the Messiah himself, in fact Peter had even declared Jesus as the Messiah in the passage immediately before this. They had witnessed Jesus' popularity... in anyone's language he was the man of the time... the MAN of the MOMENT! And they were his first lieutenants. For them being with Jesus was their extreme good fortune! And then the BUBBLE bursts with this announcement and suddenly things are not as they seem and they are deeply shocked... and the evidence that their shock is so great that they live in denial and simply refuse to believe what Jesus has said will happen to him.

But that's not the end of this little episode is it? There are implications for the disciples in what Jesus has said and this may have been an even greater shock for them. They may face the same rejection and suffering as Jesus if they are to spread the good news of the gospel... the costly discipleship of taking up one's own cross. That would have been a confronting moment for them for no one in Jerusalem, or anywhere in the Roman Empire for that matter, was under any illusion about what a cross meant and subsequent crucifixion upon it. The cross was an instrument of suffering and shame, cruel and barbaric and used as a tool of political power by the Romans. It was a fearful thing. It would have been a severe shock to them... it's a severe shock to us too. We are shocked because it is not what our vision of Christianity is necessarily all about. Is our vision more of the ethical principles of doing what is right, living right, of "doing unto others what we would have them do to us" ... and what a principal to live by. And of course this is how we are to live, but a reading such as this from Mark comes as a timely reminder... and is timely at this point in Lent... that Christianity is more than a code of ethics. That it has at its heart a symbol of suffering... the CROSS. That was the way Jesus chose... and has become such a symbol of suffering love that it still fills us with awe and stops us in our tracks if we let it.

We sanitise the Cross a bit which is why we walk the journey of Lent with Jesus to Jerusalem to be reminded, reawakened to the heart of what Christianity is. And that heart is about incredible love, a love not easily described in words. Jesus's suffering and death defies adequate explanation, it turns all our thinking upside down as to how things should be, but the cross of Christ crashes through all the false facades, the mistrust and suspicion, the prejudice and pettiness, the manipulation and meanness, the nastiness and narrowness with which we can treat each other... and says there is another way. The way of LOVE, the way of care, the way of compassion, the way of tenderness of reconciliation... the way that binds and builds and restores. Jesus way turns retaliatory thinking upside down... it is a massive statement to humanity, it is so radical that it is almost beyond comprehension... but it is the core of our faith, of who we are as Christians, of what we believe and what we stand for. This shocking way of Jesus Christ, which turns the world's thinking upside down, is our contemplation as we travel through Lent with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. The world is turned upside down for Abraham and it is turned upside-down for the disciples. Thinking outside the square eh but that's how God acts.

HYMN TIS 684 Love will be our Lenten calling

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE & LORDS PRAYER (Prepared by Margaret 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.

Loving God The cup of our lives is filled with so many blessings and challenges. May we hold our cup as your gift to us and in doing so see you in the faces of our sisters and brothers

Let us pray

We pray for your wonderful world, which is sadly tempted by power, wealth, greed and exploitation and we ask that you help us all to be more mindful of your beautiful creation. We pray that those in positions of power take on responsible advice so that well-informed and caring decisions are made.

Our prayers include people across the world, but especially those in dangerous places and for innocent people experiencing violence and the tragic effects of war and conflict. We ask you to care for the peacekeepers and the aid workers across the world and for those they care for.

Our prayers are with the many people who are vulnerable and in special need of care and love – and this includes those who are marginalized, the sick, sad, lonely, frail, undervalued, the homeless, the hungry, those in pain of body. or anguish of mind, the dying and those who mourn. We thank you for the many people who dedicate their lives to caring for others and we pray for these people as they face so many challenges.

We pray for the Church and for all communities of faith throughout the world and for those who minister in your name.

We also pray for all who worship in our community and we ask that you strengthen us to do your will and to fill us with your grace.

Dear Lord, we pray for our own families and friends, our neighbours, colleagues and ourselves. Help us to love, and care for one another as you have loved us.

Loving God, be with us and give us courage to respond to your call

These prayers we bring to you as we join together to say the prayer that you taught us

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 626 Lord of creation, to you be all praise

BENEDICTION

WORD OF MISSION

ORGAN POSTLUDE

Postlude

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

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NEWS & NOTICES