

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



3 MARCH 2024

LENT 3B



It's OK to be ANGRY if you are 'Turning Over the Tables!!'

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

From before recorded time, the First Peoples cared for this Land. We praise the Creator for the beauty of this land and honour those who have offered themselves in tending it. We acknowledge the Elders and communities who have told the sacred stories and nurtured faithfulness to the Creator. We ask God's blessing on those who continue to work for the healing and restoration of this land and her Communities.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

The morning stars profess God's glory:

the waking birds harmonize a refrain of grace.

The sun warms us with God's hope,

the night sky whispers peace to our sleepy souls:

creation's voice echoes continually in our hearts,

reminding us of God's steadfast love.

Our wisdom is shattered by God's absurd love;

God's vulnerability strengthens our feeble faith:

God's words place joy in our hearts;

we follow them to peace and hope.

HYMN TIS 121: God himself is present

PRAYERS OF ADORATION / AND CONFESSION:

ADORATION

Let us pray

You saw your children

as slaves in Egypt,

and brought them to freedom;

you see creation

held captive by our desire

for more and more,

and weep;

and so you pour out

your foolish love on us

from day to day.

All that we have learned
and think we know
has not brought meaning
to our lives;
the brokenness
of our world
needs your peace;
our pain-shattered hearts
need your healing:
and so you speak to us
through the mouth
of your Servant, Jesus.

All creation weeps
with grief,
and cries to you for comfort;
all the broken of our world
long for your wholeness;
all who hunger for hope
long for the sweetness
of your grace and joy;
and so you fill us with
the Wisdom of your Spirit.

CALL TO RECONCILIATION

At the centre of the law is God's love - that divine nonsense shown in becoming human for our sake; that weakness for us which defeats the strongest powers. This love, this grace is of more value to us than all the stocks in our pension funds. Let us open ourselves to such love as we open our hearts to confess our sins to God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Silence is kept

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

When broken-hearted prayers replace piety, when we seek wholeness through the One broken for us, then we remember we are saved by God's powerful love. We are healed, to bring healing to our world;
we are strengthened in faith,
to become spent for others;
we are set free from our bondage to sin,
so we may become servants of Christ.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: Read by Karen Roberts

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

EXODUS 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹For six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹² Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder.

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25:

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written,

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

JOHN 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' ¹⁹Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

SERMON: 'It's OK to be ANGRY if you are Turning Over the Tables!!' Ron Townsend

In my training for ministry, I did a ministerial placement at Knox Presbyterian Church, Ivanhoe. Which, incidentally, is the church where Mardie and I were married. Part of our training included doing 'trial services.' On one occasion I did one such service at Knox. The Professor in charge of teaching and preaching was assessing my leadership of worship and he had a reputation for being VERY forthright in that assessment. That day, I was rather pleased with my efforts and even more so when he approached after the

service with a beaming smile on his face. He said, 'Wow, that was the best SEVEN SERMONS I've ever heard!'

Talk about condemning with faint praise! Nevertheless, it was a good lesson!

Today's readings are all quite remarkable and invite being preached on. Exodus 20, The Law of God and the Ten commandments, Psalm 19 on the glories of the Creator God's universe, Paul's marvellous passage on the foolishness of God v the wisdom of man, Jesus throwing the money exchangers out of the temple and Jesus declaring he will build the temple in THREE DAYS! And that's just scraping the surface.

So, settle back folks, get comfortable and get ready to elbow the person alongside of you, who is dropping off!

BUT, on the other hand, let's just settle for one!

As my very wise wife often reminds me, with a KISS – K-I-S-S- 'Keep It Short Stupid!'

But, since you are only getting one, you've got some homework to do. That is, to work on all the other possibilities! Give us a ring if you need some help!

So, today, let's go with the angry Jesus! Yes, you heard right, the angry Jesus!

That's not the way we normally see Jesus depicted, is it? You know: Gentle Jesus meek and mild! After all, Jesus is love and love is always, sweet and accepting, isn't it?

But here the writer of the 4th Gospel has Jesus VERY PI!!ED OFF! He is wild! The authorities in the Temple are taken aback and while John does not say as much in the narrative, the disciples stand back in stunned silence, not sure which way this encounter is going to pan out!

So, when do YOU get angry?

Never, oh yer! Pigs might fly!

Never get angry!!?

Well, I do, and most of the time, on reflection, I am not proud of it, because often my anger is unwarranted – in fact, hurtful, for those who are the subject of the anger and usually counter-productive!

There are too many modern examples of this sort of unwarranted anger, which often end in violence, like, domestic violence or International deadly violence. Like, the anger and resulting violence being perpetrated by Mr Netanyahu, Hamas and Mr Putin. All unwarranted, all destructive, all demeaning of humanity! All perpetrated, without exception, to satisfy 'my' lust for power and control! Ugly anger, united with hate, so as to obtain power over others.

BUT there's the conundrum: Jesus gets Angry! Violent!

¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!'

Not Angry Anderson - Angry Jesus!

How do we explain Jesus' outburst and fierce reactions!?

There are a few things here, in the text, which might help us to understand his anger – to see what causes him to be so distressed!

First, John uses some 'literary license' with this story (which was absolutely fine for authors to do back then) by placing it at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. The other three Gospels place this story right at the end of his ministry, just before his passion. By placing the story here at the very beginning of his ministry, John is telling us it is critically important. It contains vital messages close to Jesus' heart. But does that explain his anger? Let's dig a bit deeper.

Secondly, a bit of first century history. The people Jesus expels, the money exchangers, had an important role in the temple. They had to be there because Israel was under Roman occupation at that time and all citizens were forced to use Roman money, Roman Coins, in all transactions. But Roman coins were unacceptable for purchasing the animals used for sacrifice in the temple. If a worshipper was to make a pure and right sacrifice to God, then that animal, that dove, pigeon, cow or whatever could only be purchased using Jewish money, Jewish coins! Worshippers had to be able to exchange their Roman coins

for Jewish coins or they could not participate in the worship of God! As strange as that may seem to us, that was the way it was in first century Roman occupied Israel.

So, in effect, John has Jesus challenging the very form of sacrificial offering which was the foundation of Jewish worship of God and had been for centuries! WOW!

So, is Jesus just 'losing it' because the money exchangers are ripping the worshippers off, or is there something deeper being declared here in Jesus' belligerence?

Consider this possibility: Might not Jesus be declaring, in word and action, that the old form of worship focused on making animal sacrifices to God is no longer valid.

Jesus by his words and actions dramatically heralds a new form of sacrifice.

And so, the question is: 'If not this form of sacrifice to worship God, then which one!?'

Which brings us to our third consideration.

¹⁸The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' ¹⁹Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?'

Melbourne biblical scholar Brendan Byrne suggests the following in his book 'Sharing the treasure': (pg 85)

'In driving out of the temple, the animals destined for sacrifice, Jesus effectively shuts down the temple as a place of worship. His own body is now to become the sanctuary where God dwells and is to be worshipped. "Zeal for (his) Father's house" will "destroy" him, in the sense that his attempt to break the confinement of worship to the physical Temple will provoke the hostility that will end with the destruction of his own physical body on the cross.'

They, the Temple authorities and worshippers, DO NOT NEED THE TEMPLE ANYMORE. WE DO NOT NEED THE CHURCH ANYMORE!

Because Jesus' body – his physical incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Holy Spirit – was sufficient and is sufficient to mediate God's grace and mercy. Jesus is the one who introduces us to the parental heart of God, the one who makes the unknowable God knowable and approachable. Then... ever since... and still today. David Lose

Little wonder Jesus was so passionate – angry – even violent! The source of his anger was his searingly hot passion to declare that he alone suffices. He alone will be the sacrificial Lamb. He alone the one who makes all things new and whole. He alone is the temple, the church, the focus of our worship. Nothing else is needed.

So, it's little wonder St John places this story at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, for at the centre of this encounter lies the central declaration of the Christian Gospel, the Good News: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'

Now that and that alone is worth getting angry about!

Angry when the Church claims any other body as its own, other than the broken body of Jesus!

Angry when the new life and supremacy of love Jesus died for is corrupted into serving our own selfish ends!

Angry when the 30 wars being waged around the planet, needlessly crucify Jesus, over and over again!

Angry when husbands and partners beat up their wives and partners because Jesus is the Prince of Peace and died and rose so that we could ALL live in that Peace!

Angry when the disabled and mentally ill and all those who are vulnerable are cast aside and neglected, because Jesus, who makes ALL things whole, declared that 'so much as you do it to the least of one of these you do it unto me!'

Yes, we can be, must be angry; when the hope, peace, joy, love and sacrifice of Christ are cast out of the Body of Christ, and out of the world, for whom he died!

And yes, finally, we are called to live as his disciples, in the church, and for the world, not because we can or must make a difference, but because he has made all the difference that matters! 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'

And to his name be glory and power and might for ever and ever. Amen

HC HYMN TIS 534: Love is his Word (v. 1-4)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

Prepared by Mardie Townsend

"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. Loving and gracious God, you know our needs before we can even begin to articulate them. You love us, nurture us, forgive us and inspire us, yet still we fall short of caring for your creation and its peoples as you would have us do. Bringing our prayers of the people to you helps us remind ourselves to think beyond ourselves – it turns over the tables of our apathy, our ignorance and our self-absorption. And so today we bring our prayers to you for all who are in need.

When we read the newspapers and watch the tv news, we are confronted with so much conflict and distress: wars, natural disasters, inter-personal conflict, financial struggles, homelessness and illness. But conflict and distress are not just in far-off places. We only need to look around us in our local communities to see people in need of your healing and wholeness.

We are appalled by the devastation we see wrought by wars. We pray for the peoples of Israel, Palestine, Yemen, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Ukraine, Russia. Overturn the tables of those who foment conflict, so that new ways of relating may be found in these places, leading to peace and harmony.

As our world and our nation prevaricate over action to deal with climate change, we think of the people experiencing floods, bushfires, storms, droughts, who are faced not only with the loss of their homes and livelihoods, but often loss of health and even loss of life. Overturn the tables of apathy among leaders, both worldwide and here in Australia, and among those who vote them in, so that care for your creation and all its peoples may take precedence over our personal benefit.

When we walk through the city and, more recently, even in our own suburbs, we are confronted by people begging, people who are homeless, people who are struggling to make ends meet. We give thanks for those who manage the Little Free Pantry and for all who contribute to stocking it. We give thanks for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and the Brigidine Sisters, who care for those who have been forced to flee their homes and seek safety here. When we become complacent about those in need, overturn our tables and confront us with the challenge of reaching out to those who are marginalised.

Lord God, your Son Jesus not only turned over the tables in the temple, but he spent much of his time healing people. Each week, it seems, we have members of our own church community who are faced with illness or declining health. Often their needs are hidden behind a façade of bravery. Inspire us, Lord, to care for each other, to provide a listening ear to those in distress, to reach out with practical help when needed, and to overturn the tables of our own self-absorption and self-protection, so that we may be more open with and genuinely supportive of each other.

These prayers we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**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 for ever. Amen.

HYMN TiS 178: Praise the God

DISMISSAL:

God speaks, and sends us forth.

We will go to proclaim God's grace and glory.

Jesus speaks, and lives are changed.

We will go to set free the oppressed,

to be the voice for those never heard.

The Spirit speaks, and the world is turned inside out.

We will become as foolish as a trusting child,

as powerless as those overlooked by everyone around them.

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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.

May the feet of God walk with you, and his hand hold you tight.

May the eye of God rest on you, and his ear hear your cry.

May the smile of God be for you, and his breath give you life.

May the Child of God grow in you, and his love bring you home.

POSTLUDE

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

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Music: Peter Hurley

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Tuesdays, 9.30am-1.30pm

Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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