

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



17 MARCH 2024

LENT 5



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WORSHIP AT HOME

The fifth Sunday in the season of Lent – a season of 40 days (not counting Sundays which are “little Easter’s”) when we hear stories that help us prepare for Easter.

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.

Greeting

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Call to worship

We are glad when we heard the call, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’

And look, now we stand in that place, gathered together by God’s Spirit.

Here gathers the children of God who worship their maker in unity.

Here we give thanks according to God’s deep desire

Here we pray for the peace of God

In our hearts, on our lives, through our relationships, over all the earth and its peoples.

Here we offer our thanks, praise, and accept God’s gift of life.

Here we worship God together!

First song – TiS 672 (ii) Lord of earth and all creation

Prayers... thanks, praise, and confession

Bless to us, God, this day, freshly made. In the chorus of birds, bless us. In the changing colours of autumn, bless us. In the rain refreshed gardens and the cooling evening, bless us. In our remembering and delighting, accept our thankfulness and praise. Bless us and heal us for we come to you in love and trust. We come in expectant hope!

Silence

Compassionate and loving Creator, give us a well of tears to wash away the hurts of our lives. Give us a well of tears to cleanse the wounds, to bathe the battered face of our world and its peoples. God, give us a well of tears or we are left, like arid earth, unsanctified.

Silence

Heal us and our grieving world of all that harms us and it. By the power of your resurrection restore us to new life set us on new paths bringing light from darkness and open hearts to choose hope over despair.

Jesus says, *“Pick up your bed and walk ... the bed of your sorrows and fears, of your grief and sin ... pick up your life and come follow my way into life!”* In and through him, and in the grace of the Holy Spirit, our sin is forgiven! **Amen, thank you God!**

The peace of Jesus Christ be with you all`

And also with you

TIME FOR LISTENING

Song – TiS 657 God of freedom, God of justice

Readings from the Bible – Brenda Grootendorst

First Testament: the Prophet Jeremiah 31:31-34 - A New Covenant

³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.

New Testament: Good news named John 12:20-33 - Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.*

Jesus Speaks about His Death

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.” ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Words worth thinking about – “Soft hearted or soft headed?” - Tony Floyd

Far, far away from the place that held all their important hopes, dreams, and spiritual memories the people wept. To a defeated people with crushed hearts and spirits a prophet named Jeremiah spoke of their God. Jeremiah spoke some bold and hopeful things. *The days are surely coming...!* Not **surely** in the sense of “I wish!”, “I hope”, “If only...”

No, “**SURELY** *the days are coming*” in the sense of CERTAINLY, ABSOLUTELY, WITHOUT DOUBT. Days when God will intervene to make something that was not before. **GOD** will give the means for human beings to be who God intends us to be.

Jeremiah, in the story, struggles to understand that his task is to tell his people the story of the terrible things that are going to happen to them. He becomes quite convinced that this is God’s message to the people, and eventually accepts that this is how it is

But just as Jeremiah accepts punishment as God’s way of judgement he discovers that God is different from humans. God ‘repents’ - has a change of heart and outlook – and keeps right on loving humanity. This is the same word and meaning that we use to speak of the human journey of change

What we hear in the words of Jeremiah is **God** speaking, **God’s** self-resolve and **God’s** self-commitment. This is **God** choosing a people and a way to relate intimately with them. This is a picture of what is offered, freely, to all people regardless of age, stage, or life experience.

God does **not** want **slaves or robots!**

God seeks partners. Partners who are joyful participants **with** God in sharing the divine pain and joy. Partners with God who enter into life’s struggles and delights. “*I will be their God and they will be my people*”, carries with it the same force as that part of the vows in a Christian marriage service that say - “All that I am I **give** to you and all that I have I share with **you!**”

So God in Jeremiah speaks of writing a new relationship on the very hearts of people.

This will not be some external force to be reckoned with or learned by heart. Some outside influence to be catered for or to. God writes a new relationship on our hearts. SA change in our ‘being’. We can do nothing to earn it, there is absolutely nothing in all our lives that we will be able OR NEED to do to earn or be worthy of it.

In just two weeks we will celebrate Easter - the living presence of God in Jesus among us and the sign of the defeat of defeat, God’s refusal to give up on us.

Jeremiah boldly reminds us that none of us are some kind of afterthought on God’s part. There were not seats left over at the banquet offered to you at discount because there were not enough **really good people** to take all the places. God just loves us - to the death!

“*I will be their God and they will be my people*” is a promise then and now and for all time!

TIME FOR RESPONDING

Giving of money and goods – part of our response of giving –
and we sing TiS 658 I the Lord of sea and sky ...

Announcements about some of what we do in
response: Activities and ministries that we can be involved in.

Prayers of the people (Prepared by Ron Townsend)

Some of the concerns we bring to God in our response – Today we especially remember the people, leaders, and people of the Baltic countries ...

"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.

To the bidding after each petition

'Melt our cold hearts'

Could you please respond

'Give us compassion we pray'

Let us pray:

God of grace, we pray for your world. We pray for world leaders in whose hands lie the power to make decisions which affect not only the economic future of nations and peoples, but also the future of life on this planet. Lord, grant all leaders of nations, wisdom, courage and humility, that their decisions may reflect appropriate regard for your creation and the equality of all people.

Melt our cold hearts

And give us compassion we pray

God of might, we pray for nations, communities and individuals affected by war or conflict. Especially the peoples of Ukraine, Russia, Palestine and Israel. Lord, you sent your only son, who suffered death on a cross so that we might be reconciled to you. Grant that your reconciling love may enter the hearts of those perpetuating wars and conflicts, that they may recognise the futility of their battles and strive for true peace. May we, too, be peacemakers in our homes, in our workplaces and in all our communities.

Melt our cold hearts

And give us compassion we pray

God of love, we pray for those who feel unloved and unwanted. In his ministry on earth, Jesus demonstrated care for the outcast, the vulnerable and the stranger. As his followers, give us the grace to reach out to those in need of love and inclusion. Grant wisdom and compassion to those whose work involves them in the difficult task of finding housing for the homeless, support for the destitute and companionship for the lonely. May they be empowered to be instruments of your loving kindness, and may we also play our part in addressing these needs.

Melt our cold hearts

And give us compassion we pray

God of glory, we pray for the church in all its diversity. We hear the good news of Jesus Christ in different ways, yet it is the same crucified and risen Lord Jesus we worship. Grant wisdom and grace to the leaders of churches, that they may demonstrate unity in Christ, in order that the world may be drawn to him. Help us, as members of the Uniting Church, to recognise that we are called to continue to seek the unity of Christ's church, and to be open to new ways in which we can engage in open ecumenism.

Melt our cold hearts

And give us compassion we pray

God of compassion, we pray for those who are sick or suffering, especially those known to us. (Pause) Through those who care for them and through your word and sacraments, may they know the power of your love to heal and bring new life, even to the dead. Grant them and us the courage to live our lives and face our mortality with confidence in your glorious promise of eternal life.

Melt our cold hearts
And give us compassion we pray

Today we especially remember the people here in Australia, and around the World, who are doing it tough because of the inordinate costs of just simply living. Open the hearts of all to be dispensers of the generosity that you made known to all in the giving away of your own Son's life. May your gracious generosity and love spread like a plague across the planet.

Melt our cold hearts
And give us compassion we pray

These prayers we pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**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
and forgive us our sin
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us in the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours. Now and forever. Amen**

TIME for SCATTERING

Song – TiS 598 Dear Father, Lord of humankind

Affirmation: We have laid our burdens down – in the presence of the living God
We have been nourished for our journey – by the grace of the living God
We have taken on the gifts of the Spirit – as gift of the living God
Now lead us, guide us, defend us – in the way of Christ in the world. In
your name and for your sake, living and loving God!

Blessing: The love of the faithful Creator
The peace of the wounded Healer
The joy of the challenging Spirit
The hope of the Three in One surround and encourage you today, tonight,
and forever!
Go in peace to love and serve God ... 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

