

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



21 APRIL 2024

EASTER 4



WORSHIP AT HOME

GATHERING TIME

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.

Focusing ... As we pause to contemplate this season of Easter, we consider the precious images in the journey of the baby of Bethlehem to the empty tomb of the resurrected Christ. Consider the generous grace and mercy given for the whole creation, the richness of life unearned and undeserved.. In the quietness and stillness of this time, be grateful to the loving parent, who faithfully travels with us through the storms of our lives, especially when we feel alone, confused and despair.

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 look forward in 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.

Focusing 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

Glory to God: Our strength & our redeemer.

The vacant cross & the symbol of the empty tomb make real your claim: that love which suffers is love which saves.

So fill your people with joy & your Church with celebration: that the world may know that your holy child Jesus is not a dead hero we commemorate, but the living One we worship.

To whom with you & the Holy spirit be our praise for ever. Amen!

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Hymn/Song: TiS 636 God has spoken to God's people

Prayers of praise & thanksgiving

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

Glory to you, Almighty God!
You spoke and life came out of darkness,
order rose from confusion and chaos.
You breathed into the dust of the earth,
and we were formed in your image.
You looked at the work of your hands,
and declared it to be very good.
And still you speak, breathe, look for us.
We praise you!

Glory to you, Jesus Christ!
You meet us as a refugee, a threatened child,
the Word made flesh, born in a forgotten place.
You call us, by name, to leave what was comfortable,
what is ours by right, to be your disciples, companions and friends.
You save us by kneeling at our feet,
meeting us in others' pain and suffering,
stretching your crucified arms wide in love to heal our brokenness and take away our sin,
walking through death to life again.
And still you meet, call, and save us.
We thank you!

Glory to you, mysterious Holy Spirit!
You brood over chaos,
mothering and shaping God's new creation into life.
You inspire prophets and evangelists
to discover the right word for the right season.
You liberate your people for mission,
claiming all of life for the giver of life for all.

Glory and thanks to you, God, Three-in-One!
You are surrounded by the song of all your saints,
you are present with us now in power and in our weakness.
We come to praise, worship, and thank you!

Confession:

If we have been singing praises with our voices and kept the joy out of our hearts;
If we have prayed for what we thought possible and hoped only for what we could see;
If we have taken your gifts for granted and expected answers from you for matters under our own control or influence;
If we have allowed waiting for your Spirit to slip into laziness and waiting on your vision to be replaced by apathy;
If we have only thought of us waiting on you and never considered how you wait on us lavishly;
Have mercy on us, forgive us and lead us into your truth and peace.
Listen, for this is a true word of God: God is merciful, and God's love is sure.
As the dove settles gently on the tree, receive the gift of peace.
As the flame rises free with light and warmth, receive the gift of new life.
As the wind moves and dances round the earth, receive the gracious gift of God's Spirit.

Amen!

NOW ... If that is so ... what we have just prayed and claimed - that we have a new beginning because God loves us and forgives us ... is THAT exciting enough to want to tell someone else about ? to go to someone and burst out: "I just couldn't wait to tell you ... !"

When was the last time something about God, or Jesus, or belonging to God's people, or what God's people are doing made you that excited ?
Has anything about God, or Jesus, or belonging to God's people, or what God's people are doing (here or somewhere else) ever made you want to shout, "I just couldn't wait to tell you...!" ????????????????

LISTENING TIME (Suzie Fergusson)

Readings from the Bible - Acts 4.5-12

⁵The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are being asked how this man has been healed,^[c]¹⁰ let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,^[d] whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. "This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone'

¹²"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Good News named John 10.11-18 ¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes^[a] it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

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Hymn/song: TiS 164 The great love of God

Reflection on the Word: Tony Floyd

The Basis of Union of this Uniting Church confesses:

"The Uniting Church affirms that EVERY MEMBER is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. She acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of his Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service." (Para 13)

In this chapter of John's good news, Jesus makes these "I AM shepherd!" "I AM DOOR!" claims right before he faces the death (not dying or resuscitation but dead and buried and rotting) of his friend Lazarus. Jesus' response to that death will lead directly to his own arrest, trial, torture and death - real death - and God's act of affirmation through raising Jesus from death.

The promise which is made - here and in that chapter 10 story - is not that dying corpses will be resuscitated, be they people or our cherished models of church or community life. The promise is that there is no separation from God and the working of God in life - personal or corporate, yours or mine. There is a story worth telling - one that we cannot stop from speaking.

"I am the Good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep!"

And ... *"I have other sheep who are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice."*

- This promise is true for groups, it is true for individuals, it is true for you and me.
- It is true when we feel cared for by those we think ought to care for us; it is true when we feel abandoned by them.
- The promise is true when we feel life coursing through our involvement in faithful discipleship and it is true when we face its and our imminent dying, death or slow and painful demise.
- It remains true whether we can see and understand it or not; true whether there are "signs" to prove it or not.

The promise stands **NOT** because Jesus made it, but because **GOD KEEPS IT.**

"What my father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one." (Jo 10:29-30)

All of this sounds (and often feels) like being locked up in our own feelings, needs, hopes, longings, dreams and frustrated possibilities; and we long for someone to set us free.

"I am the Good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep!"

And ... *"I have other sheep who are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice."*

Therefore, **We** have a story to tell, one which **demand**s (?) **NO** one which means we cannot keep silent! AMEN and AMEN

RESPONDING TIME

Hymn/song: TiS 588 In heavenly love abiding – while we sing ... **Offering of ourselves, our money & food**

Prayers of the people (Prepared by Warwick Barry)

Offering of our prayers of concern for others, the world, the church, ourselves ...

***Ecumenical Prayers** – today we join with the whole church in praying for the people, governments & people of faith in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. May they live in harmony with each other and enjoy a future of prosperity and peace.*

"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.

Please keep us alert, loving God, to the extensive needs of those around us, and guide us in how to best employ our time and gifts to express your love for them.

God our holy Friend, please save your people.

Good Shepherd, guide and inspire us.

While we eat well, some scavenge for scraps. While we drink purified water on tap, some plod a long way to obtain muddy water to carry back to their families. May we strive for a more equitable world and resources for all. May we also live more simply so that others may simply live and your creation continue to be enjoyed by all nations wisely.

God our holy Friend, please save your people.

Good Shepherd, guide and inspire us.

While our children go to school, or at home enjoy leisure, games and toys, there are other children who daily toil at making bricks or carpets, or are sold into child prostitution. May we support better human rights for all your children including women who suffer violence.

God our holy Friend, please save your people.

Good Shepherd, guide and inspire us.

While we go to bed in comfortable surroundings and sleep peacefully, some sleep under bridges, shelter in shop doorways or cemeteries, and have old newspapers for their blankets. May we support the care of all who are homeless.

God our holy Friend, please save your people.

Good Shepherd, guide and inspire us.

While we have a faith to sustain us; much love to nurture us, and a hope to draw us forward in confidence, there are many without faith, love or hope, and some who are planning suicide. We especially remember the tragic events in Sydney recently and ask your comfort, peace and hope for all who mourn the loss of friends and family. We ask for religious tolerance and understanding and love in the face of anger, bitterness and fear.

God our holy Friend, please save your people.

Good Shepherd, guide and inspire us.

While we have a land that, no matter where we travel, we can always call our home, there are a multitude of refugees made homeless by racism, war, or natural disaster. May our country be a place of welcome and support. We ask for peace between nations especially the people of Israel, Palestine, Ukraine and Russia. May division and conflict be overtaken by a willingness to work together and resolve differences in a spirit of peace and goodwill.

God our holy Friend, please save your people.

Good Shepherd, guide and inspire us.

While we have physicians to treat even our minor ailments, and well equipped hospitals for more serious ailments, there are millions without even the most basic medical services.

God our holy Friend, please save your people.

Good Shepherd, guide and inspire us.

God of justice and compassion, we do not understand all the reasons why some must suffer while others live a comfortable existence, but we do know that you are on the side of health, peace and joy and love. Please keep us on side with you, that in all our affairs our actions and words may mirror your generous mercy, truth and peace. Through Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Amen!

(Rev Bruce Prewer- Adapted)

**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**

A TIME FOR LEAVE-TAKING

Hymn/Song: TiS 233 I will sing the wondrous story

Blessing: Bless to us, O God,
the doors we open,
the thresholds we cross,
the roads that lie before us.
Go with us where we go and welcome us 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: Karen Roberts

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