

# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



28 APRIL 2024

EASTER 5



# 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.*

## Introit Father we Adore you...

### HYMN TIS 716

Father, we adore you,  
lay our lives before you;  
how we love you.

Jesus, we adore you,  
lay our lives before you;  
how we love you.

Spirit, we adore you,  
lay our lives before you;  
how we love you.

Terrye Coelho

## WELCOME

### Acknowledgement of Country

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We acknowledge the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation, traditional custodians of this land under God. We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.

### Gathering Prayer.

Easter people, we have been saved by the Risen Christ, the life-giving Vine.

**We abide in Love, the life-giving Vine.**

We are branches of the Vine—sustained, nurtured, and pruned by Love.

**We have no life apart from Love, the life-giving Vine.**

When we make our home in the Vine, and the Vine makes a home in us, we bear the fruit of Love.

**We produce the fruit of Love, the life-giving Vine.**

Easter people, how shall we bear the fruit of Love, the life-giving Vine?

**We will love and learn to love as we rest, play, work, and build community with God and one another. Amen.**

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, November 2023.*

### Call to Worship: John 15:5

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

### Hymn All are Welcome...

Let us build a house where love can dwell  
and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell

how hearts learn to forgive.  
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
rock of faith and vault of grace;  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
and words are strong and true,  
where all God's children dare to seek  
to dream God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
and as symbol of God's grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach  
beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
and live the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
bear the image of God's face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Text: Marty Haugen, b. 1950  
Text © 1994 GIA Publications, Inc.  
Tune: TWO OAKS (see RW #219)

## PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Emptier of Tombs:  
you raised Jesus  
from the grave  
so all fears might be banished;  
so the locked doors of our hearts  
could be flung open;  
so our quivering lips  
could declare what  
we have seen and heard.

Bright Glory of God:  
as you stood in the middle  
of your friends  
on that first Easter night,  
come among us now,

in this time and place,  
showing us that death and sin  
no longer stand in the way  
of our life with you.

Breath of Peace:  
strengthen us  
so we may stand  
with all who fear life;  
take our hands in yours,  
so we may serve all  
who are broken with grief;  
inspire us to share  
the grace which has been breathed  
into our very souls.

God in Community, Holy in One,  
hear us as we pray as we seek to remain in Jesus,  
The true vine of abundant life.

### **Confession**

**We use a lot of words, Gracious God, but do little to turn them into deeds. Instead of being of one heart and soul, we choose sides and form groups of folks just like us. Blessed with great grace, we have trouble sharing it with those who need it the most.**

**Forgive us, God of love. Forgive us, as we step out of our shadows into your light. Restore us, as we reveal our brokenness.**

### **Assurance of Forgiveness**

This is the good news we have to declare: God leads us out of the shadows to walk in the light of Christ.

**This is the word we have heard: our faithful God forgives our sins and raises us to new life. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

(Rev Thom Shuman)

### **Sharing of the Peace**

## **Hymn      We Belong to God...**

When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus,  
and when we're dying, it is in the Lord.  
Both in our living and in our dying,  
we belong to God; we belong to God.

Through all our living, we our fruits must give.  
Good works of service are for offering.  
When we are giving, or when receiving,  
we belong to God; we belong to God.

'Mid times of sorrow and in times of pain,  
when sensing beauty or in love's embrace,  
whether we suffer, or sing rejoicing,  
we belong to God; we belong to God.

Across this wide world, we shall always find  
those who are crying with no peace of mind,  
but when we help them, or when we feed them,  
we belong to God; we belong to God.

we belong to God; we belong to God.

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## Service of the Word – Lorraine Denniston

Scripture. Lead In: Your word O Lord ...

### Old Testament Psalm 22: 25-31

<sup>25</sup> From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;  
before those who fear you<sup>[a]</sup> I will fulfill my vows.

<sup>26</sup> The poor will eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek the Lord will praise him—  
may your hearts live forever!

<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth  
will remember and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
will bow down before him,

<sup>28</sup> for dominion belongs to the Lord  
and he rules over the nations.

<sup>29</sup> All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;  
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—  
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

<sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord.

<sup>31</sup> They will proclaim his righteousness,  
declaring to a people yet unborn:  
He has done it!

### Gospel. John 15: 1-8

The Gospel of the Lord - Praise to you Lord Jesus

#### The Vine and the Branches

**15** “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

<sup>5</sup> “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples

## MESSAGE

## Seeking, Staying Connected...

Through the written word,  
and the spoken word,  
may we know your Living Word  
Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

### Seeking and Sustaining Connection...

Shortly, I am going to ask Neville to show you three images and ask you to consider what you think is the common theme that unites them. They are three images from a wonderful photographic exhibition of the work of Steve McCurry, and American photographer, at Seaworks, Williamstown until May 19<sup>th</sup>.  
(25secs per image)

So, any oral responses on what you think the theme may be? (Pause for suggestions?)

Connection to others, both as individuals, and, as a group, is a core part of what it is, to be human, to be in close relationship, it's one of the things that both Anne and I enjoy looking forward to reading about in the Good Weekend magazine in The Age, entitled, 'Two of Us'. This presents a never-ending variety of grab bites about people of varying ages, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and occupations; who become friends, partners, and supports to each other in life. A recent article featured an 88-year-old Sicilian Giovanni a widow, and café owner, who has become good friends with a young Italian female chef Lorena aged 37, through her, wanting to source genuine Sicilian cannoli. They have become good friends through their love of cooking.

Connection with others is vital to our well-being and identity, and to us flourishing as people. In our gospel passage today, Jesus chooses to use a metaphor of gardening to convey an image of close connection as Karoline Lewis, a commentator puts it, "That intimate, profound dependence and reliance – because life is nothing without belonging, without intimacy, without relationship." How can we realise our potential if we have no grounding, no sense of origin, no affirmation or possibility outside of ourselves?

For the image, Jesus offers us is found in a section of John's Gospel, called the Farewell Discourses, where Jesus wants to leave his disciples with words of comfort, and hope, in the middle of events that will involve his death on the cross. These farewell words begin at chapter 14, and end at the close of his prayer for the disciples in chapter 17. The words follow the Last Supper of Holy Week and precede his death. In fact, the psalm we read today, begins with Jesus words on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is part of the lament section of the psalm at the beginning – our section was where David praises God for his salvation and saving power.

So, despite these pre-Easter Sunday words, we consider what Jesus said then and to us today who follow him. Jesus stated clearly in verse 5, "I am the vine: you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing." This is in fact, the last of the 'I am' statements in John, like those that speak of Jesus as the bread of life, the light of the world, the Living water, and of course the resurrection and the life. They are all in essence, mainly revelations of Jesus identity, and His abundant life that He both offers and provides.

The metaphor is one that points to mutuality, connection, union, and sustenance. The branches survive and thrive because they are connected to the vine, Jesus. He is the energy of life, flowing through all things, allowing them to be fruitful. The branches hold the grapes above the ground, free of diseases and allow the flow of nutrients to the grapes. So then how do we both seek and sustain connection to Jesus, so that the fruit that results flourishes and doesn't wither and die?

Jesus makes clear from the start of the passage that the Father is the vine grower, or gardener, who the vine is reliant on. The Father, prunes the vine and branches to ensure the most abundant fruit.

I want to suggest some ways that may help or seek and sustain connection with Jesus. As he indicates in verse 7, by allowing his words to remain in us, is a key way for connection. Through worship, devotional times, and music, we remind ourselves of Jesus words. Of course, when we pray, we bring our requests before him and his Spirit within us reminds us of His words and prays for us. Even though we cannot see Jesus, who is Spirit, like other people, like all good relationships, we need to spend time sharing things with him, and listening for his words, and receiving his love; both as individuals, and in the company of other branches, we are connected to, the Body of Christ, fellow Christians. Later, in chapter 15, he makes it clear that by keeping his commandments we will remain in his love, and also by loving others, we demonstrate that his life is real and vital in us.

So connection to Jesus is vital to seek and sustain, so it is important to notice that Jesus statement is not "you have been, or you will be branches, **but you are the branches** – a promise

for now and an assurance of peace for us all. But what about the fruit, what is the type of fruit that we the branches produce when connected?

I believe that there are some things that are helpful to consider here. Firstly, we are reminded in Galatians chapter 5 that the Holy Spirit is in the business of producing fruit in our lives, Christian virtues, if you like, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are wonderful fruit, because they impact others in a good way, and result in random acts of kindness, and a more long-term call to seek the justice and welfare of others. Secondly, we are called to love God and others, as Jesus qualifies in our passage today about love, as **Jesus loved the disciples**.

In fact the third reading set down for today from the first letter of John chapter 4, sheds light on this fruit also. As John says, “We love because God first loved us (by dying for us on the cross), and that our love for God is shown by us loving people both Christian companions and others in the world.

So love, that is real and results in loving actions for others is the characteristic of this fruit produced. Thirdly our passage from the psalm today, speaks about the fruit of our witness to Christ, our actions and words that point to him, when it speaks of, “proclaiming, God’s, righteousness, to unborn generations.” In other words being a witness to His love and grace.

As one commentator put it, “We need to acknowledge the true love, does not seek the ‘quick fix’, but is willing to commit to the long-term, seeking true justice, and attempting to be a fruit that lasts.”

The vine is the source of our life and energy, as the Reverend Bruce Epperly says, “The branches are not passive. They must nurture and support the fruitfulness of the other branches. There is an intimate interdependence between God and us; while God’s existence doesn’t depend on our fruitfulness, our bearing fruit, enhances God’s, life and mission in the world.”

As we welcome, listen to, serve and love others, the impact on their lives can have healing, transforming, and empowering effects, things that make a real difference for their lives. We don’t need to do great or dramatic things, as someone said, “We simply need to stay connected to Jesus and love the people God sends across our path, genuinely, humbly and sacrificially.” May we all continue to thrive as fruitful branches connected to the abundant life of Jesus.

**Amen**

## HYMN (TIS 382)

## Now the Green Blade rises...

Now the green blade rises  
from the buried grain,  
wheat that in the dark earth  
many days has lain:  
love lives again,  
that with the dead has been:  
*Love has come again,  
like wheat that springs up green.*

In the grave they laid him,  
Love whom hate had slain,  
thinking that he never  
would awake again,  
laid in the earth,  
like grain that sleeps unseen.  
*Love has come ....*

Up he sprang at Easter,  
like the risen grain,  
he who for the three days

in the grave had lain,  
raised from the dead  
my living Lord is seen:  
*Love has come ....*

When our hearts are wintry,  
grieving, or in pain,  
then your touch can call us  
back to life again  
fields of our hearts  
that dead and bare have been:  
*Love has come again,  
like wheat that springs up green.*

John Macleod Campbell Crum  
1872-1958 *alt.*

## Offering

As we offer our gifts to you, Loving God, remove any doubts about how they might be used, as you offer food to the hungry, hope to the despairing, joy to the grieving, and peace to the broken. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

(Rev Thom Shuman)

## Notices

### Prayers of the People- Ron 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.*

This a responsive prayer

May your love be like the vine,  
**growing fruit that feeds and sustains.**

Let us pray

For all the blessings of this life,  
we give thanks to you, Creator God.  
For families, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and strangers,  
who nurture us, that the love of God may grow within.  
That your love, your word, like a seed,  
may grow to produce in us, good fruit.

May your love be like the vine,  
**growing fruit that feeds and sustains.**

For the leaders of various nations and cities,  
that they may lead with strong hearts, gentle hands and generous spirits,  
with compassion and mercy, with wisdom and grace.  
May they reflect your will guiding all their actions and decisions.

May your love be like the vine,  
**growing fruit that feeds and sustains.**

For those who serve in harm's way,  
those who live in dangerous places,  
those who live in areas of war and strife,



those who live in fear,  
those who worry about employment, bills, food,  
and struggle just to find dignity in life.  
May your grace bring peace and safety to all people, one to another.

May your love be like the vine,  
**growing fruit that feeds and sustains.**

For those who suffer from any illness or dis-ease — of mind, body, or spirit.  
Restore these, and all those we carry in our hearts; to fullness of health — health as only you, O  
God, can bring.  
May your mercy shower each of us with healing mercy and love.

May your love be like the vine,  
**growing fruit that feeds and sustains.**

For those who are dying, and for those who have died.  
Send forth your comforting love.  
Give solace to those who mourn.  
Console those who grieve.  
May your grace surround us  
like a mantle upon our heads,  
a shawl upon our shoulders,  
a hand, to hold our hand.

May your love be like the vine,  
**growing fruit that feeds and sustains.**

For those, like Philip the Eunuch,  
and all those who have opened the scriptures to others.  
For all those who have carried your good news to distant places.  
And for all those who have shared your gospel, close at hand.  
In life and death may we follow your saints, that with our sisters and brothers of every  
generation, we may abide forever in your love.  
May the word of the Lord continue to speak and direct and sustain us all.

May your love be like the vine,  
**growing fruit that feeds and sustains.**

#### **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**

*Prayers adapted from Terri Pilarski of the Methodist Church of USA  
and from Janet Nelson, 'Let us Pray.'*

# HYMN (TIS 681) Lord let me see, see more and more...

Lord let me see, see more and more,  
see the beauty of a person, not the colour of the skin,  
see the faces of the homeless with no-one to take them in,  
see discouragement because she'll never win:  
see the face of our Lord in the pain:  
Lord let me see.

Lord let me hear, hear more and more,  
hear the sounds of great rejoicing, hear a person barely sigh;  
hear the ring of truth, and hollowness of those who live a lie;  
hear the wail of starving people who will die;  
hear the voice of our Lord in the cry:  
Lord let me hear.

Lord let me care, care more and more,  
care for those who feel the loneliness, for those who have no say,  
care for friends who have no job and find it hard to face the day,  
care for those with whom we sing and work and pray:  
and in care Jesus Christ will be found:  
Lord let me care.

Lord let me learn, learn more and more,  
learn that what I know is just a speck of what there is to know;  
learn from listening to my neighbour when I'd rather speak and go;  
learn that as we live in faith and trust we grow;  
learn to see, hear and care, with our Lord:  
Lord let me learn.

Lord let me love, love more and more,  
love the loveless and the fragile, help them be what they can be,  
love the way that I would like them to be looking after me;  
for to know you is to love them and be free,  
and in love Jesus Christ will be found:  
Lord let me love.

Ross Langmead  
1949-

## BLESSING - Warwick Barry

Go in peace, and remember:  
goodness is stronger than evil;  
love is stronger than hate;  
light is stronger than darkness;  
life is stronger than death;  
victory is ours  
through Christ who loved us.  
**Amen.**

(Rev Desmond Tutu)

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,  
**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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Music: Peter Hurley

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## NEWS & NOTICES

