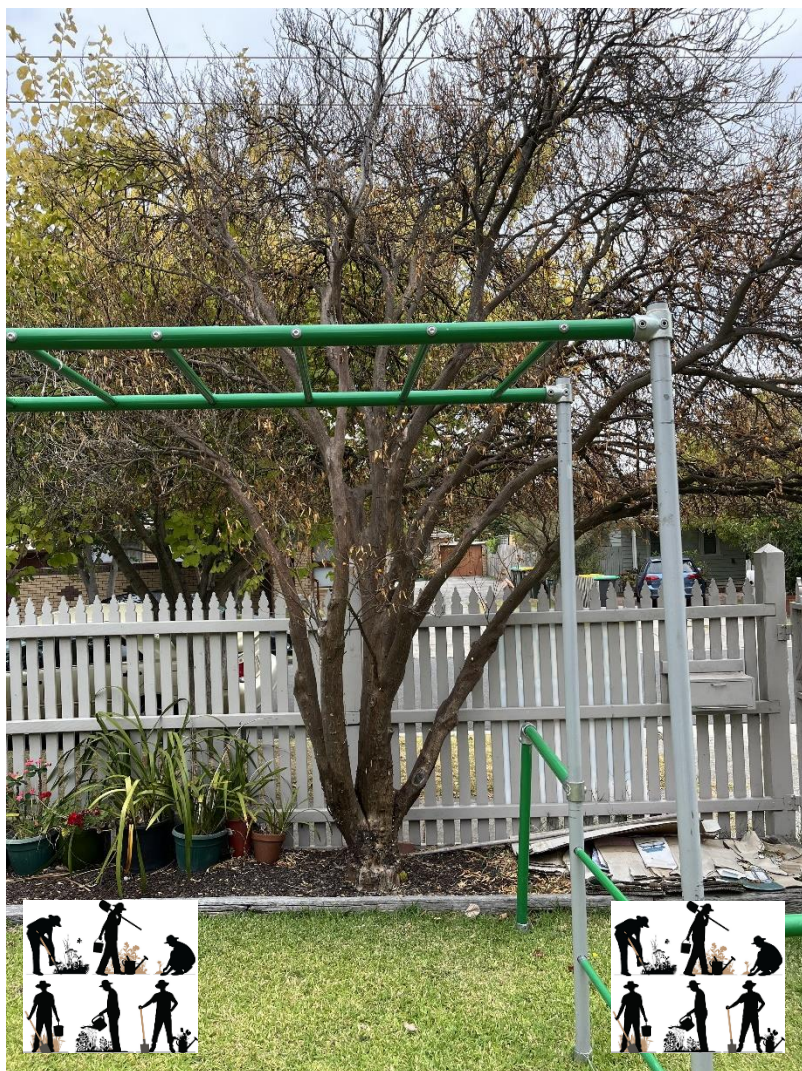


# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



23 MARCH 2025  
LENT 3



Forget about 'DRILL, DRILL, DRILL, 'Baby!' – Try the DIG-DIG-DIG GOD, who  
FEEDS-FEEDS-FEEDS! And you will produce fruits that REALLY  
SUSTAIN!

# 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.

Go to your prepared place OR prepare a space in the house; a comfortable chair, a lit 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.

## WELCOME:

Welcome, wherever you are and whatever time you choose to worship. We are ONE in CHRIST and by joining into this worship you join hands and hearts with all Christians everywhere in praise of our astonishingly loving and caring God including your sisters and brothers at Ormond. Yes, it is true life brings us some pretty rough sufferings but remember, in this season of LENT all that suffering and 'death' is laid upon the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ our brother.

## CALL TO WORSHIP:

Creator God, you made us, and you are with us in every breath.

**We worship you, and open our hearts to you.**

Jesus, you heal us and teach us, you change us and you love us.

**We thank you, and we sing your praise.**

Holy Spirit, you give us new hearts and fill us with the power of your love.

**Create in us a clean heart, O God,**

**and put a new and right Spirit within us. Amen.**

## SONG: Let all creation bless the Lord

1. Let all creation bless the Lord,  
till heav'n with praise is ringing.  
Sun, moon, and stars, peal out a chord,  
stir up the angels' singing.  
Sing, wind and rain! Sing, snow and sleet!  
Make music, day, night, cold and heat:  
exalt the God who made you.
2. All living things upon the earth,  
green fertile hills and mountains,  
sing to the God who gave you birth;  
be joyful, springs and fountains.  
Lithe water-life, bright airborne birds,  
wild roving beasts, tame flocks and herds:  
exalt the God who made you.
3. O men and women everywhere,  
lift up a hymn of glory;  
let all who know God's steadfast care  
tell out salvation's story.  
No tongue be silent; sing your part,  
you humble souls and meek of heart:  
exalt the God who made you.

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# PRAYERS OF ADORATION / CONFESSION / ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

## ADORATION / APPROACH

Holy Friend, lover of us all, assist us to worship you with unfeigned sincerity. Thrust aside anything counterfeit in us, and overcome any fears that may inhibit us. Help us to trust your hospitality and to worship you as children who are warmly loved and treasured.

For you are indeed lover of all,  
you are indeed redeemer of all,  
you are indeed transformer of all  
you are grace-giver to all and for all.  
For you are nurturer of all  
you are the friend of all and with all  
you are Life-giver to all  
We praise you with our imperfect all  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen!**

CONFESSION: together -

**Life-Giving God, we have spent our lives on that which does not feed our souls,  
and labored for that which is not life.**

**We have starved ourselves and others of your love.**

**We open ourselves to your presence, your forgiveness and your love.**

**Feed us life, that we may truly live,  
and bear the fruits of your grace.**

*Steve Garnaas-Holmes*

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

Holy Scripture says:

*“Return to the Lord, who will show you mercy,  
come back to God who will abundantly pardon.”*

In the name of Christ Jesus, Saviour of the world, I declare to all who turn to God in repentance and faith:

Your sins are forgiven! Go in peace.

**Thanks be to God!**

DOXOLOGY: (Tune: TIS 768 (i) \_\_\_\_\_ Old 100th)

**Praise God whose love fills time and space,  
praise Christ whose grace redeems our race.  
Praise Holy Spirit, Friend divine,  
let heav’n and earth all praise combine!**

*B D Prewer 2003*

## SERVICE OF THE WORD – Robyn Mulder

Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet;

**A light to our path**

ISAIAH 55:1-13

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup>Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. <sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. <sup>4</sup>See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. <sup>5</sup>See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

<sup>6</sup>Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. <sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. <sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

The Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

LUKE 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup>Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

<sup>6</sup>Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ <sup>8</sup>He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

The Gospel of the Lord

**Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ**

## SONG: One Day the News was Grim (Tune: TIS 125: LEONI)

1. One day, the news was grim: Some people sought the Lord to tell of Galileans killed by Pilate's sword.  
"Is anyone to blame? Is this because they sinned?" —  
whenever there is trouble, people ask again.
2. Then Jesus turned to say: 'It's nothing they did wrong that means their loved ones now are singing mournful songs.  
And yet you know it's true that tragic things abound;  
since life is fragile, now's the time to turn around!'
3. God, we pray for help to see, what we should change,  
to see the values we ourselves should rearrange.  
Now help us know our sin, the good we've left undone,  
the times when you have looked for fruit, and we've borne none.
4. In Christ, we see your grace: You give us one more day —  
another opportunity to live your way.  
May we again repent and turn our lives to you,  
and may we love our neighbours more, and bear much fruit.

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## SERMON: Repentance: 'THE WAY' through tough times TO 'Abundant Life!'

This is a photo of our cumquat tree

Yes, it is very sad and very dead!

When we came to live at 6A Elm Grove it was there then. And it was a prolific producer. I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that it has, over its lifetime, produced at least a 1,000 jars of cumquat marmalade.

Many people have harvested fruit from it over that 30-year period (and beforehand as well – when we came it was already a mature tree.) Moreover, it has been a source of joy for our grandchildren who regularly climbed in its branches and ate its fruit. And it has been a wonderful shade-giver as well as a home for many birds to build their nests in and raise their young.

2 years ago, I noted it was not producing as much fruit as normal – so I dug around it watered it and fertilized it, then mulched it and watered it some more.

Alas! To no avail and Mardie remarked the other day – ‘Ron, I think you will need to take the chain saw to it, in the not-too-distant future.’ Very sad!

The last verses of the gospel reading today contain the parable of the barren/fruitless fig tree. The gardener pleads with the owner of the tree, who orders him to cut it down because it has been fruitless for 3 years. He pleads: ‘Give it another chance. I will dig around it and fertilize it, and in another year, if it still remains fruitless you can cut it down then!’

Bad things happen to people, whether you are Christian or not! Like the title of the book from Rabbi Levi, suggests, ‘*Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people?*’ Well, first, it is worth noting that in God's eye, there are no bad people, just humans exhibiting bad behaviours. Despite those behaviours, they ALL still remain God's beloved children. Even if they do not accept their birthright, namely, being children of God and heirs of the Kingdom and living like it.

In the shocking stories of death earlier in the Gospel reading, Jesus declares that we are not punished by God for our sins. We punish ourselves by our bad behaviours – and we punish, degrade and diminish our brothers and our sisters by our bad behaviours! Not God! God never punishes – scolds and challenges and denounces bad behaviours – BUT NEVER wields the big stick of punishment!

God's response to our disobedience is not punishment, but more love, until we bear fruit that sustains. God is like a patient gardener who will give an unfruitful tree more nutrients and another year to produce its fruit.

Jesus says, God does not punish sin, but rather gives life.

But there is a warning here for us, too! Unless we repent, that is, turn to God, we will perish. I know that sounds pretty harsh! But perish here does not mean hell-fire-and-brimstone kind of ‘perish!’ Rather, perishing is a degraded state of living: behaviours which stand in contradiction to the God-given gifts of gracious new life and supreme love.

So, think about the 2 sons in the wonderful parable of the prodigal son that is the gospel story next week. The younger: who exhibits extreme levels of ‘bad behaviour,’ but eventually turns towards home and the father. He has an inner awakening (he is still full of self-loathing, only too aware of his own ‘sin,’ and as a consequence, has determined to be no more than a slave in his father's household.) Despite all that he still URNS FOR HOME - TURNS FOR HOME.)

And what's the Father's reaction - the father will have none of his son's self-loathing and self-hatred!

He has no interest in punishment when his son finally comes home.

On the contrary, he is overwhelmed with love for him. No finger pointing, just rejoicing, jumping for joy; because his son has repented (turned to home and his father in body, mind and soul).

So, the father gives him everything!!!! He reigns upon him his gifts: his love, his forgiveness, his joy - everything. Not because the son does the right thing (because he

hasn't) but simply because the father loves him with every fibre of the father's being. Not a damn thing matters other than that. He was lost and is found! He was dead and now is truly alive! 'Break out the booze and the best food – time for THE party to end them all!'

Of course, the nature of the father's extra-ordinary love dictates that the father cannot force the son to come home, just wait, with his abundant gifts of life and love at the ready, for when his son finally repents, ie, TURNS TO HOME AND FATHER. That is all that matters!

This is extraordinarily counter-cultural for his time, and indeed even for now. I mean what was he thinking!? HE DOES NOT DESERVE IT! HE HAS NOT EARNED IT! What he really deserves is a good swift, hard kick up the backside and be forced to repay his debt! Their culture! Our culture!?

Bit like cutting down a fruitless tree, and chucking it on the fire. "No, No!" Pleads God the gardener, "give it another chance, give him another chance – he will come good and come home – it will come good – give it a bit of tender loving care and it will come good and produce fruit in abundance. Give it/him/us/another go -eventually it/him/us will turn to come home!'

BUT, on the other hand, the older son's bad behaviour persists (oh yes! BAD BEHAVIOUR!!!!?? – yes, I know, the older brother did all the 'right things' culturally – looked after Dad, looked after the farm, worked long hours, saying the right things etc. BUT, and it's a big 'but', he cannot bring himself to turn towards home and the father and his brother (that is re-pent!) Why? Well - because he feels he deserves better!! And his younger brother deserves less, a lot less!

Jesus railed against this sort of bad behaviour!! The 'bad behaviour' of entitlement – privilege – power over others -earned merit - particularly, among the religious leaders of his day – or the terminology often used biblically - self-righteousness and pride. They really got up Jesus' nostrils!

The other day Tim Wilson and Zoe Daniel (the two main candidates for the Federal Seat of Goldstein) happened to be at one of our local coffee shops together. Zoe approached Tim and wished him all the best for the election, to which he replied, 'I am going to beat you and win!' And turned his back and walked away.

The older brother sees himself as superior - better than his younger brother. And by most measures of his society, and our society, he is right! But not by the father's measures. He loves to death, he loves to death, both his sons and wants both to experience the fullness of his love, his rejoicing, his joy and all that he has.

Repentance is a matter of allowing the father to love him out of his prideful sinful ways. I'll repeat that: Repentance is a matter of allowing the father to love him out of his prideful sinful ways.

But he chooses to turn his back on that love, and when the parable ends, he is still out in the field, filled with the sin of bitter self-righteousness. Does he come 'home?' Does he repent? Well, we don't know. We need to finish the parable – in our own lives - it is left with us!

But a word of warning.

Better sooner than later – who knows when a tower of Siloam might fall on him!?! Worse! And then he will have lived a short-changed life, largely devoid of the gifts of mercy and grace and forgiveness and love – which are the fruits of life humans are created for.

So, repentance is important and urgent and ongoing! Repentance is a matter of allowing God to love us out of our sinful ways. None of that 'oh, I believe, but I've got a lot on, I'll get around to it later!' The Galileans sliced up by Pilate's henchmen in the temple and the Jerusalemites crushed by the fallen tower, demonstrate the urgency aspect of repentance. Putting off the nurture, gift of love and life, on offer from the Father, when

we have no idea what might happen to us down the track, that is ill-advised, is wasteful, is selling ourselves, our humanity short, and is largely fruitless.

Repentance means turning to God now!

Why would one delay turning to God and receiving the gifts which are at the heart of life and are offered to us by God, through Jesus, offered to transform our lives right now!?

This is what truly sustains. God's gifts of abundant human life: love, hope, grace, peace in our present and on-going existences. And particularly when various catastrophic 'towers fall on us!' as it were.

Finally, remember God's response to our disobedience is not punishment but more love, and more love, and more love, until we are worn down by love and turn to home and so enable our lives to be filled with those fruits of the kingdom: peace, hope, joy, love and grace – the building blocks of life. Remember, God is like a patient gardener who will give an unfruitful tree more nutrients and another year to produce. Another chance! Jesus declares that his Father, God, does not punish sin, but gives life, nourishes, enables, makes fruit-bearers of us. But to bear that fruit, first we ourselves need to turn to the Father and be nourished by God's grace and love and life. Amen.

## HYMN: TIS 609: May the mind of Christ

1. May the mind of Christ my Saviour,  
live in me from day to day,  
by his love and power controlling  
all I do and say.
2. May the word of God dwell richly  
in my heart from hour to hour  
so that all may see I triumph  
only through his power.
3. May the peace of God my Father  
rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort  
sick and sorrowing.
4. May the love of Jesus fill me  
as the waters fill the sea;  
him exalting, self denying,  
this is victory.

*Katie Barclay Wilkinson, 1859-1928*

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:** Prepared by David Northwood

"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.*

Lord we pray  
Hear our prayer today  
As we pray for others  
And for ourselves

Lord help us

To care for the uncaring  
To love the unlovable  
To respect the disrespectful

To show compassion to the uncompassionate  
To build harmony amongst the disorderly  
To forgive the unforgivable  
And to show humour to the humourless

Lord as we enter this season of Lent, we come before You seeking spiritual renewal. Cleanse our hearts, minds, and souls from all that separates us from You and our spiritual centre. Renew our spirits and draw us closer to Your presence. May this season be a time of deep reflection and transformation as we grow in faith to You.

**Psalm 51:10**

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

With our prayer for repentance in this season, we come before You with a contrite heart, acknowledging our shortcomings. We ask for Your guidance through the times that we have fallen short in our spiritual journey.

With our prayer for humility in this season, we pray for a heart of kindness. Teach us to put others before ourselves and to serve with a selfless attitude. May we walk humbly before You and others. Teach us to serve others with a humble heart and may our lives be a reflection of your love.

With our prayer for patience in this season, we come to You asking for the gift of patience. In a world that moves so quickly, it is easy to become frustrated and impatient. Teach us to wait on Your timing and to trust in Your perfect plan. Help us to remain calm and steadfast, even in difficult circumstances.

When I run after what I think I want  
My days are a furnace of stress and anxiety.  
If I sit in my own place of patience  
What I need flows to me and without pain.  
From this I understand that what I want also wants me,  
Is looking for me and attracting me.  
There is a great secret here for anyone who can grasp it.

**From Romans 12**

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

With our prayer of gratitude in this season, we come before You with a heart full of gratitude for the countless blessings You have poured into our lives. Help us to recognize and appreciate even the smallest gifts from You. Teach us to live with a grateful heart

And with prayer and with meditation and with human goodwill and with ingenuity and the with blessing of the Lord these good things will come to pass.

Amen

And we pray together as Jesus 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 196: Dear Christians, one and all**

## DISMISSAL:

As we head our separate ways:

**Incline us to see opportunities to nurture.**

As we head into our places of dwelling:

**Incline us to create places of hospitality.**

As we engage in our work-a-day world:

**Incline us to notice the stranger and the outsider.**

As we sit down to watch a show:

**Incline us to remember and cherish the stories of all we encounter.**

And as we head into difficult encounters:

**Incline us to share your life-giving love for all – no exceptions.**

## BLESSING:

God the creator-Gardener dig deep into your heart unfettered grace  
God the life-giving Son transform you with his nurturing, life-saving love  
and God the Holy Spirit invade you in every part of your being with  
peace eternal

**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 Ron Townsend

Music: Peter Hurley

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Tuesdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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## NEWS & NOTICES