

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



APRIL 13TH, 2025

THE STEADFAST LOVE OF GOD



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 the Lord Jesus Christ
And the love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all
And also with you

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome, friends, to this time of worship on Palm Sunday—a day that invites us into the great paradox of our faith: joy and sorrow, triumph and humility, hope and heartbreak. Today we join the crowd that welcomes Christ with shouts of praise, even as we remember where this road leads. We remember that Christ came not with conquest, but with compassion, humility, and truth. May this time of worship open our hearts to the peace he brings—not the peace from defeating our enemies, but the deep peace that endures through love, through loss, and through God’s steadfast faithfulness. Whether you arrive today with celebration or sorrow in your heart, know that you are welcome, and that here, together, we draw near to the mystery of God’s redeeming love.

CALL TO WORSHIP – Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!

Let Israel say,

“His steadfast love endures forever.”

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.

**This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.**

I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

**The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.**

This is the Lord’s doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

**This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!

O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches,

up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.

**O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.**

OPENING PRAYER

God, we gather on this day to begin a week of contrasts.

From hope to despair to hope again.

As we begin the week, as we join with the crowd,
help us cut through the noise to see what is happening,
to see what is at stake.

As the story unfolds,
open us to both the hope and the pain.

In this time of worship,
prepare us to celebrate, to weep, and to wait.

Amen.

HYMN 245 We have a gospel to proclaim

**We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing His glory, tell His worth.**

**Tell of His birth at Bethlehem,
Not in a royal house or hall
But in a stable dark and dim:
The Word made flesh, a light for all.**

**Tell of His death at Calvary,
Hated by those He came to save;
In lonely suffering on the cross
For all He loved, His life He gave.**

**Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
Empty the tomb, for He was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share his victory.**

**Tell of His reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified;
He sends His Spirit on His Church
To live for Him, the Lamb who died.**

**Now we rejoice to name Him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel message we proclaim:
We sing His glory, tell His worth.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for you alone are good and your steadfast love is forever.
The creation of the world was your doing

and is marvellous to our eyes.

Your prophets told us of the coming one
who would teach your ways
and sustain us with your word.

Your child, Jesus Christ, though one with you
gave up all he had,
taking on human flesh
and walking the path of obedience
all the way to insult, betrayal and death,
trusting only in your vindication.

Though he was rejected by those who had cheered him,
you made him the cornerstone of new life
and raised him to the highest place of honour.

He has opened the gates of justice
and become our salvation,
so with shouts of joy we greet his appearing,
and proclaim that Christ is Lord
to your glory forever.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

With the psalmist, we declare, "Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them!" But we forget that only by your grace can we be righteous. With the crowds, we proclaim, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" But we neglect to follow you when you show us the ways to make peace on earth as it is in heaven. With the Pharisees, we notice our siblings doing their best to follow you and command, "Order them to stop!" But we refuse to listen to your command to love our neighbors as you love us. Forgive us, merciful God, and free us to follow Jesus down the road into Jerusalem, confronting the death-dealing powers of this world with the truth of your peace and steadfast love. **Amen.**

Let us pray together:

**Merciful God,
Our maker and our judge,
We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed:
We have not loved you with our whole heart,
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;
We repent, and our sorry for all our sins
Father, forgive us.
Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life;
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Hear the assurance of the apostle Paul , "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.". Paul proclaims that in

Christ, no matter what you have done you are not bound by the past. And so I declare to you Christ's word of forgiveness: Your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

PASSING OF THE PEACE

Christ is our peace. He has reconciled us to God in one body by dying on the cross and rising to new life.

We meet in his name and share his peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

HYMN 636 – God Has Spoken to His People

Refrain

**God has spoken to his people, hallelujah!
and his words are words of wisdom, hallelujah!**

**1 Open your ears, O Christian people, open your ears and hear good news.
Open your hearts, O royal priesthood, God has come to you, God has come to you. Refrain**

**2 They who have ears to hear his message, they who have
ears, now let them hear;
they who would learn the way of wisdom, let them hear God's word, let them hear God's word.
Refrain**

**3 Israel comes to greet the Saviour, Judah is glad to see his day;
from east and west the peoples travel: he will show the way, he will show the way. Refrain**

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

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

A light to our path

Luke 19:28-40

28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They said, "The Lord needs it." 35 Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37 Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38 saying,

"Blessed is the king

who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,

and glory in the highest heaven!"

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." 40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

SERMON

May the meditations of our hearts and our minds be always acceptable in your sight, God our strength and our redeemer.

Amen

In the first verse of Psalm 118 we hear:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!

Forever.

God's steadfast love endures forever.

This is the good news right here. It's our greatest hope. But sometimes it's the hardest thing to believe. When we look around at violence and greed and hunger and bigotry and on and on and on we wonder 'just where is this love? This love of God that endures forever?'

Jesus himself understands this feeling on his way to Jerusalem. Not that you would necessarily know it from our reading today.

Those of you who follow the lectionary will know that sometimes where the readings start or finish leaves out the full story. By and large the lectionary is a good thing. It helps us make connections between different parts of the bible. But sometimes you miss something which changes the whole tone of things. It's like telling everyone you had the family over for Christmas and the food was amazing! But you left out the bit about the shouting match with your cousins in the front yard. That example is completely made up, by the way.

Let me explain. The reading from Luke today of Jesus riding to Jerusalem on a donkey includes followers proclaiming

"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"

The pharisees are quick to jump on this. 'Jesus, tell them to shut the heck up'.

Side note: they're probably not being joykillers. They're probably saying, "Be careful! If the Romans hear this they will come for you".

But Jesus says "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." He is declaring that God's Reign will not be silenced by the powers that be. The parade, the hallelujahs - if we stop here we might get the impression this is a celebration and one that can't be stopped!

But boy do the next four verses, which we didn't hear today, change how we see things. I'm going to read them now.

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you,

and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

This does not sound like a celebration.

What strikes us here is the violence. It’s horrible. But what Jesus is describing here is not a punishment from God. He foresees what will happen to Jerusalem—its destruction at the hands of its enemies. He foresees that the city’s enemies—ultimately Rome—will destroy the temple.... And the Romans will do this in response to an uprising from militant Jews against their occupiers. Jesus knows that violence will just create more violence.

But here’s something to make Jesus’ state of mind all the more visceral. The word translated here as wept is the Greek word ‘Klaio’. It doesn’t mean the gentle shedding of a tear. When we famously read in John’s gospel that “Jesus wept” at Lazarus’ death that word is dakruo which means gentle weeping. Klaio on the other hand is visible, racking, chest-heaving sobs. This is not detached judgment. This is a man flooded with grief. Happiness and celebration seem far from his mind.

But there’s something quite curious about Luke’s version of the story. Here we are reading it on Palm Sunday and yet there are no ... ? Palms.

In other Gospel accounts of Jesus’ arrival, the crowd waves palm branches. This might remind us of the Festival of Booths, when Israelites celebrated their liberation from Egypt by waving branches and singing Psalm 118. But by the first century, palm branches had taken on an added layer of meaning—they had become a nationalistic symbol of victory, especially after the Maccabean revolt, when Jewish rebels used them to celebrate military triumph over foreign rule. So when the crowd waves palms and cries “Save us!”, they’re not just celebrating a festival—they’re hoping for another political victory, another liberator.

But Luke ditches the palms. Why? Well he still quotes psalm 118 but he gives it a little twist.

In Psalm 118, verse 26 we read ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’ Luke has the crowd say “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” The fact that Luke adds an explicit reference to a king shows that he’s more interested in who Jesus is and what he’s doing.

We know that Jesus is many things. He is Lord. He is saviour. He is Prophet. He is priest. On his entry into Jerusalem, he is a king. He’s not like other kings. He values care over force and empowering others over having power over them.

But before we take the moral high ground by taking pride in how humble our “Christian” king is it’s worth noting that he is fulfilling Jewish prophecy. Zechariah 9:9 reads ‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ So the donkey thing is not what shocks. It’s what he’s going off to do.

The crowds are thinking “Look! It’s our king. Like Zechariah said! He’s on a colt! Triumph is ours! Victory is ours! He will save us from the Romans!” It’s like the Psalmist in verse 25:

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!

O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Success! Victory! Triumph!

I mean, we can relate, right? Let’s not judge these people who just want the Romans off their back. Like the Egyptians were on their back and the Babylonians and the Persians. Who doesn’t want the final victory over their enemies? Who doesn’t want peace?

That's why, unique to Luke, the crowds say "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" But the victory and peace they want is not the victory and peace they will get.

What kind of victorious king sobs over the violence that he knows is coming? Shouldn't he be the one to make sure it doesn't happen? What kind of king journey's eyes wide open into his violent crucifixion.

As Jesus rides to Jerusalem he says 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!'. This is a saying with many layers, not least about being able to recognize who he is and the message he is bringing. But in a very practical sense he is saying that what brings peace is not violence. Rising up against your oppressors with violence might be understandable but it will also bring you to ruin. This is an extremely difficult lesson to put into practice. The peace Jesus brings requires a change of heart—a letting go of expectations, self-righteousness, and control.

But here's the thing: by rejecting violence Jesus doesn't escape suffering either. And nor will we. In a world utterly infected with the sin of violence, by rejecting violence Jesus brings it upon himself. We may have the good fortune to live in a part of the world where this is not the consequences of rejecting violence. But we may very well encounter derision and division when we refuse to play the game of condemning our enemies. It's a kind of death for us too—a surrender of false securities and the illusion that by controlling something we can make it better.

But then where is salvation?

Well, when the angels sing of peace on earth and the crowd sings of peace in heaven – all brought about by the coming of messiah – they are not wrong. It's just where the crowds see the victory, Jesus sees the cost. And this is what makes him truly human and divine. Knowing that the ultimate victory is coming through the cross, he still grieves for the victims of violence. But in the fullness of time all will be made well. Paul speaks to this in his famous passage from his letter to the Philippians.

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
6 who, though he existed in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be grasped,
7 but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 assuming human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a human,
8 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death—
 even death on a cross.
9 Therefore God exalted him even more highly
 and gave him the name
 that is above every other name,
10 so that at the name given to Jesus
 every knee should bend,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

In Jesus Christ God becomes us but refuses to play the violent games we play. He dies as a result and is resurrected thus showing us that the sin and violence of the world will never win.

But there's something else. We don't just passively sit by and watch while God rescues us through Jesus. It is true that we don't save ourselves. Jesus saves. But Paul begins the part of the letter to the Philippians I just read with the words 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ... who emptied himself, took the form of a slave, and gave himself fully for us.' Let that same mind be in you!

Christ doesn't just show us how to be humble; he passes through death, and we are invited to follow—not necessarily in literal martyrdom, but in the death of the ego, of self-will, of clinging to worldly power. The cross, then, becomes not just a sign of what Jesus did, but a pattern for transformation. And Palm Sunday is the moment that invites us to start walking that path—where celebration and sorrow mingle, and the way to life leads through death.

But here I think, is the most mind-bending aspect of all of this: the call to die to the controlling and self-justifying self – even as that death feels excruciating and a sacrifice too great to bear – is in fact the gift we are offered. It's not a test to be passed but a gift to stop resisting.

While the cosmic victory of Christ over sin might seem a long way from the violence-filled world we see today, the example Christ has set can also be viewed throughout history. The acts of love and kindness and bravery that inspire us are intimations of the Kingdom of God brought about by Jesus' brave entry into Jerusalem on a donkey to sacrifice himself to the powers of the world. Not only are we inspired to mirror his compassion we are inspired by his courage to journey into this sometimes uncomfortable, but liberating new life.

I began this sermon by noting that Psalm 118's opening verse declares that God's steadfast love endures forever. Well guess what it ends with? A declaration that God's steadfast love endures forever. It is a reminder that God's love is the alpha and the omega. The beginning and the end. Always present as we make the journey to the heart of salvation.

Amen

APOSTLE'S CREED

I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.**

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

**He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting, Amen.

HYMN 349 In the Cross of Christ I glory

**1 In the cross of Christ I glory,
towering o'er the wrecks of time;
all the light of sacred story
gathers round its head sublime.**

2 Through the cross, Christ's love empowers us
worldliness and self deny;
by his Spirit it inspires us
him, through love, to glorify.

3 When the woes of life o'ertake me,
hopes deceive and fears annoy,
never shall the cross forsake us,
from it shines our peace and joy.

4 Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
by the cross are sanctified;
peace is there that knows no measure,
joys that through all time abide.

5 In the cross of Christ I glory,
towering o'er the wrecks of time;
all the light of sacred story
gathers round its head sublime.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE – Prepared by Marg Davis

Today, Palm, or Passion Sunday, the 6th Sunday of Lent, we give thanks for our many blessings as we pray for others – near and far

Let us pray

Dear Lord this afternoon we pray for so many who are victims of war and horrific war-related actions- especially the innocent people of Ukraine, Russia, Gaza and the countries within Africa that are experiencing large-scale armed violence.

Our prayers go out to the millions of refugees, the poor and the homeless all over the world. Many are suffering from inadequate shelter, not enough food and limited medical assistance

We give thanks for those who have travelled far and wide, away from their families, to provide medical support, and care, often putting their own lives at risk in dangerous regions.

Our world is in turmoil and many people are vulnerable. We pray that you guide decision makers, and leaders, and help them to be wise and compassionate and not to put their own needs ahead of others.

In our prayers we think of religious leaders and congregations of all faiths and we pray that people respect and care for one another, regardless of differences.

We give thanks and offer our prayers for the many service providers in our own community, especially those involved with the mission and work of Uniting that Stacey spoke about, during worship last Sunday

Dear Lord, as we enter Holy Week we pray for the sick, the sad, the lonely and for all who are marginalised. For those who are hurting we ask that you provide comfort and healing, for those experiencing dark times we pray that you provide 'light' and for all who are dying and mourning the loss of loved ones we pray that you provide comfort.

Heavenly Father as the crowd welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with loud Hosanas and palm branches may we love and care for one another and together we say the prayer that you taught us

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 forever. **Amen**

OFFERING

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation;
through your goodness we have these gifts to
offer, the fruit of our labour and of the skills you
have given us. Take us and our possessions to do your work in the
world. Blessed be God for ever. **Amen**

HYMN 231 At the name of Jesus

**1 At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now:
this the Father's pleasure
that we call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.**

**2 Humbled for a season
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious,
when from death he passed.**

**3 In your hearts enthrone him,
there let him make new
all that is not holy,
all that is not true.
He is God the Saviour,
he is Christ the Lord,
ever to be worshipped,
trusted and adored.**

**4 When this same Lord Jesus
shall appear again,
in his Father's glory,**

there with him to reign,
then may we adore him,
all before him bow,
as our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

WORD OF MISSION

In sunshine and shadow, joy or grief,
this is the day which the Lord has made,
Rejoice and be glad in it.

Step gratefully into this holy week;
tread softly for many things are already bruised;
go reverently for holiness is found in unlikely places;
walk lovingly,
for the love of the Crucified One
is the key to all things
on earth and in heaven.

BLESSING

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

DISMISSAL

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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Presider: Brad Denniston
Music: Karen Roberts

Church Office
Tuesdays, 9.30am-1.30pm
Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm
Phone: 0411 958 127

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

Website: www.ormondunitingchurch.org