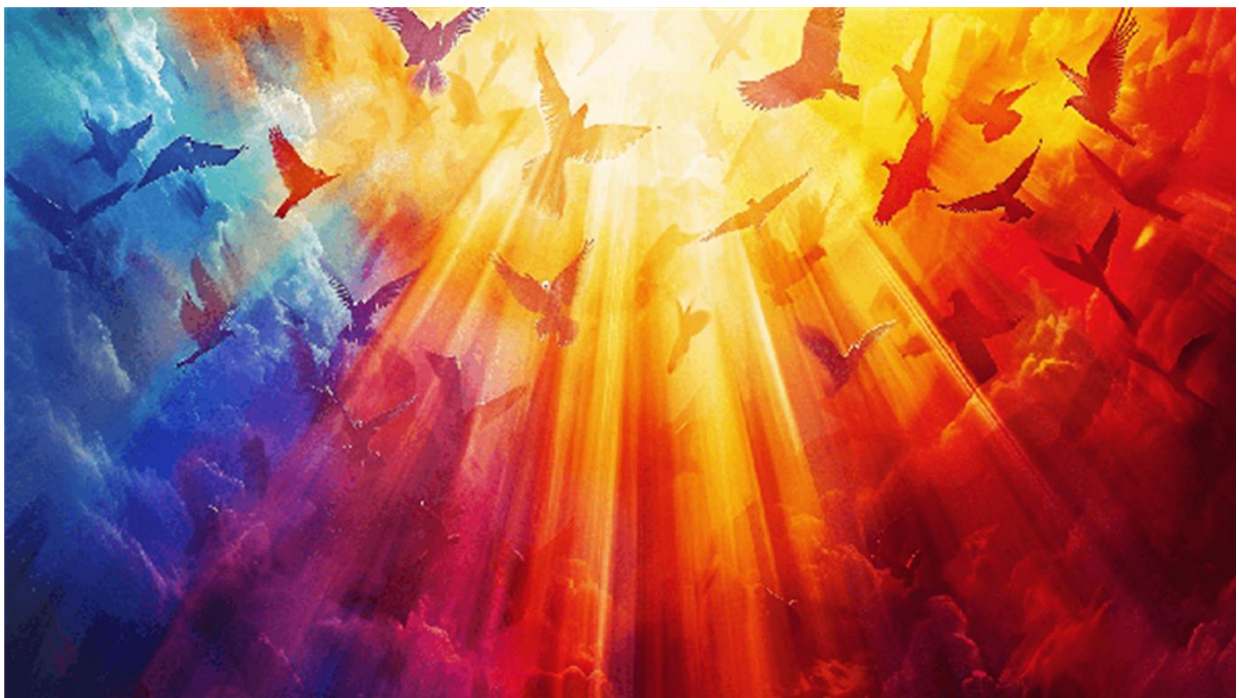


ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



27 APRIL 2025

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND
EARTH



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

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

When the disciples saw the Lord,

they were very joyful.

The joy of the Lord Jesus be with you all.

And also with you

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Good morning and welcome to worship on this second Sunday of Easter. Today we gather in the name of the risen Christ—the One who holds all things together, who speaks peace into our fear, and who calls us to proclaim him to the world in word and deed. As we listen to the words of Scripture and lift our hearts in prayer and praise, we are reminded that resurrection is not just an event of the past, but a living reality that meets us here and now.

This morning, we'll explore one of the Bible's most awe-filled passages—a vision from the Book of Revelation that reveals the risen Christ in glory and power. We'll be reminded not only of his majesty, but of the astonishing truth that we are called to share in his priestly ministry—standing between heaven and earth, bearing his love into the world.

Let us worship God together, with joy and expectation.

CALL TO WORSHIP – Psalm 150

1 Praise the Lord!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty firmament!

2 Praise him for his mighty deeds;

praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

3 Praise him with trumpet sound;

praise him with lute and harp!

4 Praise him with tambourine and dance;

praise him with strings and pipe!

5 Praise him with clanging cymbals;

praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

6 Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

OPENING PRAYER

There are many doorways to cynicism, Jesus,
many reasons for despair,
many causes for fear;
but there is no excuse for giving them ultimate power;
not if we really believe what we claim to believe.
Resurrection is real, Jesus;
we have touched it, and seen it;
our own lives bear witness to it,
and it constantly reveals itself in our world.
And so, in spite of the fear that nags at us,
in the face of the despair and cynicism that taunts us,
in denial of all that would seek to steal life away,
we offer you our love,
our devotion,
our lives,
as an offering of resurrection faith
and defiant praise.
Amen.

HYMN 215 You Servants of God

1 You servants of God,
your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad
his wonderful name;
the name all-victorious
of Jesus extol:
his kingdom is glorious,
and rules over all.

2 God rules on high,
almighty to save;
and still he is nigh,
his presence we have;
the great congregation
his triumph shall sing,
ascribing salvation
to Jesus our King.

3 Salvation to God,
who sits on the throne!
let all cry aloud,
and honour the Son:
the praises of Jesus
the angels proclaim,
fall down on their faces,
and worship the Lamb.

4 Then let us adore,
and give him his right,
all glory and power,
all wisdom and might,
and honour and blessing,
with angels above,

and thanks never-ceasing,
and infinite love.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for you meet us in our doubts
and fill us with life and peace.

You are the one who was and is, and is to come
— the beginning and the end —
who breathed life into the earth and its creatures.
Our ancestors put their trust in you
and celebrated your mighty acts of salvation.

You sent your child, Jesus,
as a faithful witness to your goodness and love.
He was killed by the powerful,
but you raised him, as the firstborn from the dead.
Appearing behind the locked doors of our fear
he breathed Holy Spirit into us
and commissioned us
to carry his words of peace and mercy to the world.
Seated at your right hand as Leader and Saviour,
he frees us from sin
and makes us a kingdom of priests
to serve you 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

Loving God, we confess that at times we do not reflect the joy of resurrection when fear becomes resentment and vulnerability becomes aggression. We confess that we do not always live in the spirit of new life or feel comfortable sharing in the Good News. Forgive us when we find it more comfortable to lash out at others than to risk the joy and encouragement of new life in Christ. Call us back to Your ways, O God, to seek hope and reconciliation, restoration and peace. In the name of the Risen Christ.

And now 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.**

Christ is Risen! The stone is rolled away, the tomb found empty. Mary calls out, "I have seen the Lord!" We have seen Christ, too, in every helping hand, in every heartfelt gift, in every choice to restore life in this world. We are called to this new life, a life of forgiveness and reconciliation. God loves us and desires great joy for our lives. And so I declare to you: 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 228 - Crown him with many crowns (verses 1-4 only)

1 Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne;
hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own:
awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for me,
and hail him as your chosen king
through all eternity.

2 Crown him the Son of God
before the worlds began:
and we who tread where he has trod
crown him the Son of Man,
who every grief has known
that wrings the human breast,
and takes and bears them for his own,
that all in him may rest.

3 Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
those wounds yet visible above
in beauty glorified;
no angel there on high
can fully bear that sight,
but downwards bends a burning eye
at mysteries so bright.

4 Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save:
his glories now we sing
who died, and rose on high;
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD – Read by Karen Roberts

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

A light to our path

John 20:19-31

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Revelation 1:4-18

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him,
and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

So it is to be. Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

9 I, John, your brother who share with you the persecution and the kingdom and the endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire; 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last 18 and the Living One. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

SERMON – Between Heaven and Earth

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

Amen

His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire; his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

As far as descriptions of Jesus go, I think it's fair to say this is one of the least likely to make it into the Illustrated Children's Bible.

The Book of Revelation is a strange, strange book. Its weird and wild imagery has made it controversial throughout Christian history. It almost didn't make it into the bible. Theologians as respected as Martin Luther and John Calvin struggled with Revelation because they found it so obscure. So, who would be foolish enough to preach on it when Doubting Thomas from John's gospel is waiting in the wings for his annual moment? Well, me apparently.

But I think it's kind of cool that we are reading this strange book in our little suburban, mainline church in Australia. It has much to tell us and many ways it can shape us - If we know how to read it right.

The book gets its name from its first word in its original Greek. That word is apokalypsis. But this is where problems can begin. We hear that word and think 'apocalypse' and then we think things like 'nuclear apocalypse,' or 'apocalyptic bushfires,' or 'climate apocalypse'. So we start to think the book is about violent end times. To be sure, Revelation has some pretty dramatic imagery. But apokalypsis actually means 'unveiling' and that's why the book is called 'Revelation'. It reveals something to us about who Jesus Christ is and what he has done.

John himself tells us that he is writing to seven actual churches in Asia (what is now known as Turkey) from the island of Patmos. He is a prisoner being persecuted for his beliefs and he is seeking to comfort those churches who were also being persecuted by showing them the ultimate victory of Christ. The strange imagery is symbolic and allegorical language borrowed heavily from the Old Testament. So even though much is strange about Revelation, John is actually standing in line with the prophets of the Old Testament – telling us what God has in store for us.

But there's another reason for the use of symbols, allegories and analogies. And that is because what John is describing can't be captured using ordinary human speech. In attempting to depict the risen Christ and his cosmic victory he is grappling with something that we humans cannot fully

comprehend. This is another good reason why this book should be read seriously but not literally. It helps us see the universe differently and lifts our vision to God's goodness, mercy, and power.

So we read this passage at easter time because it reveals the cosmic scope of Christ's victory through his resurrection. Indeed, John describes Jesus as the first born from the dead. His resurrection is not just a show of God's power. Through rising from the dead he is the "first born" of the general resurrection where all creation is reborn and made new.

However, in that same sentence John describes Jesus as 'faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and ... the ruler of the kings of the earth.'

Now I don't know about you but what I know about Jesus and what I see going on in the world really makes me wonder if we can call Jesus the ruler of the kings of the earth. I'm not sure there's a lot of loving your enemies and turning the other cheek happening among the rulers of the middle east or Europe or Africa or America or anywhere really. Don't get me wrong. I know our world leaders must make hard decisions about their security but there's outright aggression and conquest in every corner. Sin sure seems like it's got the upper hand in the fight for the souls of some of our leaders.

But then the first-century world that John is writing from might be even worse than today. Rome and their sympathetic kings and governors dominated daily life. Armies patrolled every province. Slavery was everywhere. Cruelty, executions and massacres were commonplace. And John was in a pretty dire situation himself – persecuted, exiled, imprisoned. Not to mention the churches he was writing to. So, John wasn't deluded by any privilege or comfort into thinking Christ had now made the world exactly as it was meant to be.

But his faith was based in what had happened in Bethlehem and Galilee and Jerusalem – the ministry, death and resurrection of a different kind of king. The foundation of the faith was what Christ had done and not what the rulers of the world were doing.

But do not for one minute go thinking that this letter is purely consolation or encouragement to hang on for the second coming of Jesus. On the contrary this passage contains one of the most important concepts for us as Christians and how we understand who we are to be in the world.

In verses 5 and 6 John writes 'To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father'.

Did you catch that?

Made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father.

Made us priests.

Us. You. Priests.

This is amazing.

This speaks to the protestant idea of the Priesthood of all Believers. Funnily enough it was Luther, who didn't like Revelation much, who gave us this concept. It's the idea that we all have direct access to God through Christ, not just the priest in the temple. It means believers can bless and intercede and proclaim. Collectively it means we are called to be God's holy people for the sake of the world.

What Revelation is telling us is that despite the troubles of the world – in fact, because of the troubles of the world - as priests, we have one foot in the kingdom of heaven and one foot in the

kingdoms of the earth. We bring the hope and joy of God to the world, and we bring our love for the world to God.

This is not some abstract, esoteric, up-in-the clouds idea of who we are. We are in fact doing this already. We do this:

when we are a gentle and caring presence to a friend in pain.

when we offer loving support to a grieving family member

when we speak of justice when it makes others uncomfortable

when we silently pray for someone in a quiet everyday moment

when we forgive someone who has wronged us

when we see the hard-to-like as made in the image of God

when we help someone to grow and flourish in their gifts

And we do it when we gather together to worship and carry what we receive in worship into the week.

But this is not withdrawing from the world to let the kings of the earth rule. On the contrary, we are embodying a different kind of power. We embody a rival authority rooted in love and sacrifice. And so by calling us to be priests Jesus is sharing his authority. Sharing authority is not something the Kings of the world often like doing. When we forgive, serve, bless, or speak for the voiceless, we are exercising priestly power—the kind of power that imitates Christ's risen rule.

John's visions of the cosmic, resurrected Christ is the hope that sustains us as we minister to the world. Like the communities that John wrote to, we might feel small and insignificant and powerless. But John assures the seven churches that their persecution is not the whole story, and they needn't feel like they have failed to transmit the gospel.

For us too, the faith we have in the coming together of heaven and earth, and the way that it shapes our actions, is part of a much greater horizon. This means that no act of love or service is meaningless because in Christ those acts exist in eternity.

This is all very weird and wonderful and theologically rich but for those very reasons the Book of Revelation can sometimes feel overwhelming. So, with that in mind, I want to revisit the final two verses of our reading because I believe they speak to this feeling of being overwhelmed. They are deeply moving. After John describes the appearance of Christ, he says this

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last and the Living One. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades."

John is overwhelmed by his vision – not simply because it is strange but because it is awe-inspiring. But then the next moment is beautiful. Jesus places his right hand on him and says "Do not be

afraid". This more than any other so-called sign or symbol is the proof that John is in the presence of Jesus – a warm touch and a command not to fear. When he follows up by saying he is the First and the Last and the Living One it is a promise that he will be with us for eternity.

Christ tells John that he, Jesus, was dead but is now alive forever. And now he holds the keys of death and Hades. He defeats death by dying. For in dying he rises to new life and brings all of creation with him. While death remains real in our time Christ has overcome it in eternity. The book of Revelation unveils this enormous gift and calls us to live between heaven and earth, proclaiming and embodying this good news for all. So may we go into the world with the confidence that we are held in Christ's hand, called to be his priests—speaking hope, embodying love, and living without fear.

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 155 O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder

1 O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:

How great thou art! How great thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:

How great thou art! How great thou art!

2 When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:

How great thou art! How great thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:

How great thou art! How great thou art!

3 And when I think how God, his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burdens gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
How great thou art! How great thou art!

4 When Christ shall come with shouts of acclamation,
To take me home, what joy will fill my heart!
Then I will bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
How great thou art! How great thou art!

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE – Prepared by Di Richter

"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.

Today, we have been reminded of the astonishing truth that we are called to share in Jesus' priestly ministry—standing between heaven and earth, bearing his love into the world. Let us pray for others with hope and expectation.

Crucified and living God, we pray for the peace of the world, for harmony and good will between nations, for honesty and compassion in the exercise of government.

We pray for all who are locked in lives of poverty, violence or disease.

Risen God, send us to be instruments of your peace and, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Crucified and living God, we pray for the preservation of the earth, for a delight in its beauty, a respect for its creatures, for wise and just use of its resources.

We pray for creatures who are endangered by our cruelty, indifference or greed.

Risen God, send us to be good stewards of your creation and, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Crucified and living God, we pray for our land, We pray for an appreciation of our diverse backgrounds, heritages and needs and for a common sense of unity and purpose especially in this week of elections for our federal government.

We pray for all who live in fear because of prejudice, intolerance or exclusion.

Risen God, send us to be agents of your reconciliation and, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Crucified and living God, we pray for your church, for unity and love between Christians, for power to faithfully proclaim your gospel in the world.

We pray for those whose faith is threatened by disobedience, persecution or disbelief.

Risen God, send us to be witnesses of your resurrection and, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Crucified and living God, we pray for those with whom we live and work, for our families, our friends and for ourselves, for relationships of mutual trust and love.

We pray for those who are shut away behind bitterness, resentment or regret.

Risen God, send us to be bearers of your love and, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Crucified and living God, we pray for all in need, for comfort for the sad, peace for the anxious, relief for the suffering, and patience and strength for those who care for them.

We pray for those who live with grief, loneliness, despair or pain.

Risen God, send us to bring your healing and your hope and, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Crucified and living God, We remember and give thanks for your faithful people of every age who have believed and trusted in you.

Help us, like them, to recognize the marks of your wounded love and your risen power, that, with them, we too may know you in our midst.

Risen God, in life and death let us rejoice in your presence and, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Let us now join the prayer that 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

OFFERING

Gracious God, through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, you have given immeasurable grace to us. May our offerings reflect the grace we have received, and symbolise lives committed to the service of our risen Lord.

Amen.

HYMN 217a - Love Divine All Loves Excelling

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

2 Come, almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave:
thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

3 Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be,
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

WORD OF MISSION + BLESSING

Go now to love and forgive,
for as God sent Christ,
so now Christ is sending you.
Obey God above any other authority
and bear witness to Christ's resurrection life.

And may God continue the work of salvation in you;
May Christ Jesus meet you in your doubts and fears;
And may the Holy Spirit fill you with peace
and speak through you with mercy.

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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Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES