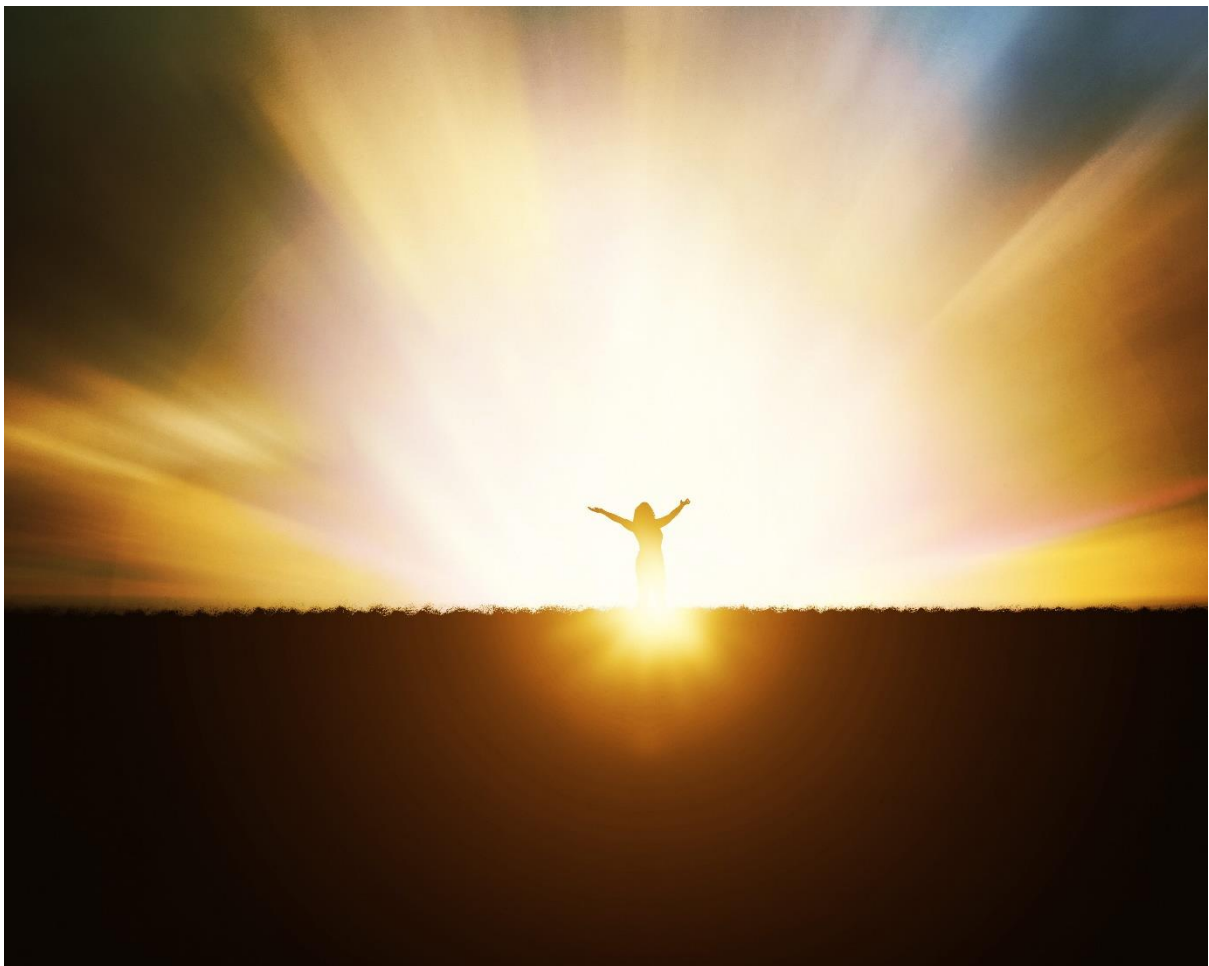


ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



4 MAY 2025

EASTER 3



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 Lord be with you
And also with you

THE CALL TO WORSHIP:

Now is the time to sing!
to sing the good news of God:
**who awakens us with dawn's embrace,
who surrounds us with joy and life.**
Now is the time to offer praise to God,
in every place, with every voice:
**to rejoice in the One who leads us through each moment
with a gentle hand and a word of hope.**
Now is the time to join all creation in extolling God,
from the depths of the sea to the farthest galaxies:
**We will sing the good news of Easter!
We will rejoice in the God who loves us.**

(c) Thom M. Shuman

HYMN TIS 386: 'By your kingly power, O risen Lord'

Text: James Phillip McAuley

PRAYERS OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

ADORATION

Lord, we sing your praises loud and clear for all you have done for us.
We thank you for being with us in our times of grief.
We thank you for hearing our cries in the night.
We thank you for bringing your joy to joyless lives
We thank you for seeing us through the messes we make in our lives.
We thank you for friends and family whom we love and who love us.
We thank you for your great mercy and faithfulness.
We thank you most of all, this day for your precious Son, the Crucified–Risen One, who has made all things new

CONFESSION

But even as we utter our devotion to you we also admit to our sad hypocrisy. We confess:
We are witnesses to the Resurrection, Lord,
yet we do not follow Christ.
(pause for self-examination)
Merciful God...

How great your Easter triumph,
how thin our Easter response.
You invite us to follow you,
and we divert ourselves with the world's choices.
We admit our love when questioned,
but don't live in obedience,
and are not devoted to tending your flock.
Forgive us for the sins we see
Save us from the sins we hide from ourselves.

(Pause for reflection)

As we acknowledge the depth of our sin, we see glory in God's redemption.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Worthy is the Lamb, massacred to redeem us. To him and to God be all blessing and honour and glory and might.

For Christ's sake our sins are forgiven. And for his sake we are the instrument chosen to witness to the resurrection. By the power of your Holy Spirit in our lives, may we feed all your lambs, tend all your sheep and bring the name of Jesus Christ before all, declaring "He is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world "

To the glory of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our sins are forgiven

Thanks be to God!

SCRIPTURE-THE WORD: Read by Marg Davis

Your word, O Lord is a lamp to our feet

A light to our path

ACTS 9:1-20

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'

REVELATION 5:11-14

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice,

'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!'

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,

'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!'

And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the elders fell down and worshipped.

JOHN 21:1-19

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Christ is risen. Alleluia

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

HYMN TIS 204: ‘Come, let us join our cheerful songs’ *Isaac Watts 1674-1748.*

SERMON: The HORIZON view which truly amazes!

When the great author Robert Louis Stevenson was coughing away his life with a lung disease, his wife, Fanny, walked into his bedroom and said, ‘Well, I suppose you’ll tell me that this is a beautiful day!?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied, looking at the sunlight that streamed in through the window. ‘You see, I refuse to let a row of medicine bottles be my horizon!’

In today’s Resurrection appearance story of Jesus to the disciples behind closed doors, they are a struggling lot who have lost hope once again and are discouraged and disillusioned after the death of Jesus (despite the fact that the Risen Lord has met with them and at least one, Thomas, has uttered that great affirmation of faith, ‘My Lord and My God!’)

But still, they really don’t know what to do with themselves. The prevailing feeling is one of loss and grief and ‘where to from here?’ It is at this point that Peter makes the suggestion that they might as well go and throw their nets out and do a little fishing – that is, engage in what they know best; engage in their daily routines. They retreat, as it were, for their own sense of security, into the known and familiar.

I liken this to the ‘pecking’ response. If a chicken is in danger (say, chased by a fox) it will run but when that gets too hard, it will retreat into instinctive well-known behaviours like stopping and pecking at the ground – which of course ends disastrously!

Sometimes when facing difficulties in life, health or faith, familiar routines and physical activity may provide the pathway forward for us, because they ‘feel’ less threatening and difficult to cope with.

OR put into the perspective of Easter faith; too often in our lives we miss – or perhaps I should say, ‘I MISS’ resurrection experiences. Why? Because I am so caught up in the latest discouragement or failure or ‘sin’ or ‘death’ that has come to pass in my daily living.

I am not suggesting for a minute that such a reaction of disappointment and discouragement is always the case or even that it is not normal, acceptable, perhaps even inevitable. I do, however, want to suggest that it can cripple not only our personal productivity, but our faithfulness, to the extent that we may become so distracted and disillusioned, and dare I say depressed, that we fail to follow in the way of the Risen Christ.

So, indeed, if Christ has risen and the gift of new life is available for all, free of charge, then, surely, our lives will never be the same again, maybe scary and certainly different, but never the same.

If indeed, Christ has risen and the gift of new life is available for all, free of charge, then, how can I possibly return unaffected to my daily work, my ‘nets,’ my daily ‘fishing,’ and live as if nothing has happened.

If indeed, I return to my home, my family, my work and act as if nothing has changed, where is my horizon fixed? I’m sure you know the old saying, “If it feels like God is distant from me and my life, guess who moved!? ... or didn’t move”

I am not suggesting such radical conversion is easy, it's not. It's tough!

When I 'gave my life to Christ' – that is, knew in my heart, that out of love he died for me, this was as a 14 or 15 year old, I felt amazing joy BUT also felt confusion and trepidation. Before this conversion I knew what I wanted to do with my life – become a Nuclear Physicist, make lots of money and marry a beautiful woman.

One of them came true! But the other two seemed 'wrong,' in-appropriate – so, what was I to do?! Furthermore, it was only a short time later that I felt the overwhelming urge to candidate for ministry. Now that really scared the pants off me! I was in a right state of mind!

So let me introduce you to two different horizons: the sensible and the celestial horizons.

The sensible horizon is the one where we can see what is ahead and we shape our lives accordingly. It is the one by which we mostly live our daily lives
Enough fuel in the car, enough food on the table, enough money in the bank, a steady job, good relationships and not too much that we can't understand, handle and control. This is the normal, sensible human horizon.

The Celestial Horizon is the view of life beyond the normal. It is the horizon of meaning and faith and mystery and 'the beyond!' AND death and life anew,' This is the horizon of God.

But note, neither of these Horizons is exclusive to God or to Humans – God can live in the normal human horizon, did so, in the person of Jesus.

And humans are made little less than God and can live by the celestial horizon, even as they live in the world of the normal or sensible horizon.

Let me share some examples from Biblical history.

Think of the first disciple, the father of the faith, Abraham – what an amazing vision/horizon he had and stuck to - childless yet promised descendants greater than the stars in the sky! Then look at Moses, who was captured, unwillingly, by the vision of the promised land and led God's people to freedom! Look at the amazing conversion story of Saul of Tarsus, which we heard earlier; an amazing story of changed horizons, which took him from persecutor of the followers of Jesus, to St Paul, the one who became a devoted disciple of Christ and gave us and the world much of the recorded biblical witness in the NT. Look at the disciples of Jesus, all of whom went on to serve as faithful followers, even when it meant placing their lives at risk, even giving their lives for the sake of the Gospel. All of these disciples of God lived according to the celestial horizon and allowed it to shape their daily journey – their normal or sensible horizon.

In my teenage confusion of horizons, a minister of the Gospel challenged me to let God's celestial horizon shape my everyday horizon on life. And here I am.

Jesus prompts us to, as it were, cast the discipleship net on the 'right side' of our **daily-life boat** and thus, enables us to haul in an astonishing catch!

In the film of the Victor Hugo classic, Les Misérables, starring Liam Neeson and Geoffrey Rush the central character, Jean Valjean has just been released from prison after 20 years of imprisonment for stealing bread, and is on his way to serve out his life sentence in a parole centre. He goes to a local Bishop's house and begs for food and lodging. During the night he steals the church silverware and flees after knocking the bishop unconscious. Later that day a small band of soldiers arrives with a handcuffed and bound

Jean Valjean and the stolen silverware. The captain says that Valjean claims that the bishop had given Valjean the silverware but is sure that is a lie and just needs the bishop to confirm it so he can take Valjean away to be guillotined. The bishop shocks all when he declares that he did, indeed, give Valjean the silverware, and remarks forcefully to Valjean, 'but why didn't you take the silver candlestick holder as well, I told you to take the candle-stick holder too!' The bishop then sends the protesting housekeeper off to get the candlestick holder. Later, when all but the bishop and Jean Valjean are there, the bishop says "Jean Valjean, the Lord has given your life back to you, go and live that new life in the knowledge that God has forgiven you and now you are to live your life as a disciple of the Risen Christ." And that is exactly what he does. Thus, both the bishop and Valjean's daily lives are lived from the perspective of the celestial horizon - the horizon of God.

Today we will 'sit' together, around the Lord's Table and share bread and wine just as those early disciples sat around a fire on the beach and were fed bread and fish by their Risen Lord. May we like them allow this feasting with and of Jesus to direct and shape our lives of discipleship in the world.

"It is the Lord, It is the Lord!!" Cried Peter

To his name be all glory, praise and thanksgiving!

AMEN

Let us pray,

Mould us and our daily living, Crucified-Risen One, according to your celestial horizon of love and grace! Amen

HC HYMN TIS 534: 'Love is his Word...'

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: Prepared by Heather Baxter

"As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light a candle to remember all those who are part of our church community."

Light a candle.

With one foot firmly planted in heaven and one foot firmly planted in earth we pray:

Father

We look to the earth and see destruction of your beautiful world as peoples take, take, take and forget to give, give, give. But we also see brave and courageous acts by people in love with your perfect blue globe: the global fights to save disappearing species, the mass plantings of appropriate trees by volunteers in areas that have been deforested and the small acts of individuals caring for what they buy, use and dispose of. Stretch our imaginations to imagine a better world and energise us to set to work.

We look to the earth and see the pain of the ordinary people as they seek a peaceful family existence, and a place to call home. We pray for all your people - our friends, our enemies - knowing that like Saul you can change things around - making old enemies, true friends. We know that you can change our hearts - making it possible for us to forgive old hurts, to repair the bridges of relationships that have collapsed.

We look to the earth and see new governments forming and disintegrating and re-forming. We pray for the federal government forming in Australia - that members will act wisely and according to the desires of the people of their electorates. We pray that we will have the courage and energy to speak to our representatives when the government fails to act with justice and love.

We pray for ourselves - the trials we are navigating and the joys which are also part of our existence. In silence we reflect on these individually.

Remind us that we are your chosen ones – a holy nation, a royal priesthood – with one foot firmly planted in heaven and one foot firmly planted in earth.
Amen

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.**

HYMN TIS 209: 'And can it be that I should gain'

Charles Wesley 1707-88

DISMISSAL:

Now it is time to get up and go.

We will leave in order to follow God into the world.

Now it is time to enter the brokenness all around us.

We will go to bring the healing and peace of Jesus to all.

Now it is time to bring words of hope and grace to all.

The Spirit will give us the words we need in every moment.

(c) Thom M. Shuman

BLESSING:

Christ is risen. Alleluia

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Father, bless as we go

Jesus walk beside us

Holy Spirit guide us

WORD OF MISSION:

Go in peace to love and serve the Risen 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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