

Ormond Uniting Church



Pentecost 14
September 14, 2025

Minister: Rev Ron Townsend
Chair of Council: Dr Mardie Townsend
Music: Dr Karen Roberts

GREETING:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.
And also with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

From before recorded time, the First Peoples cared for this Land. We praise the Creator for the beauty of this Land and honour those who have offered themselves in tending it.
We acknowledge the Elders and communities who have told the sacred stories and nurtured faithfulness to the Creator.
We ask God's blessing on those who continue to work for the healing and restoration of this Land and Her Communities.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Let our voices mingle with those of the earth;
may our hearts join the beat of her joy,
for our triune God is with us:
the Source of all being surrounds and upholds us.
Christ Jesus walks beside and before us.
The Spirit moves within and between us.
Blessed be God, our wonder and delight.

HYMN: TIS 474 Here in this place (v.1,2,4) :

PRAYERS OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

ADORATION

Let us pray:
God of life,
in the largest moon and the brightest star
we see the work of your hands.
In the smallest insect and the darkest cave
we see the breath of your Spirit.

God of hope,
in the dampness of dew and the cold of mountain streams
we feel the work of your hands.
In the whistling wind and the heat of the desert
we feel the breath of your Spirit.

God of peace,
in the songs of birds and the calls of animals
we hear the work of your hands.
In the crash of glaciers and in bubbling hot springs
we hear the breath of your Spirit.
God source of life,
Jesus, firstborn of all creation,
we offer you our praise
Amen

CONFESSION/REPENTANCE

We confess our sins:
For our foolish or careless use
of the gifts of your creation:
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

For our indifference to the needs of others,
our brothers and sisters for whom you died:
Christ have mercy.
Christ have mercy.

For our neglect of the means of grace,
for superficial worship, for selfish prayer
Lord have mercy.
Lord have mercy.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God is love.
Through Christ our sins are forgiven.
We take hold of this forgiveness
and live our lives in the power of that love.
Thanks be to God

THE PEACE:

The Peace of the Lord be with you!

And also with you

HYMN TiS 143 Immortal, invisible God only wise (v.1-3):

SERVICE OF THE WORD:

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

A light to our path

LUKE 15:1-10

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³So he told them this parable: ⁴“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

SERMON: LOST AND FOUND RON

Earlier this year a young Melbourne man who was a keen and experienced bush walker was inadvertently separated from his fellow walkers and was lost in the high country in NSW. This was a very difficult and dangerous area in which to be lost. Yet surprisingly he survived 14 days in this harsh mountainous country. He was found by a group of walkers and was helicoptered out to safety. It was big news back then!

He was lost and he was found

There were many aspects to his experience of his being lost and being found. Let me share a few.

He was very well prepared should he become lost. Good equipment and food, very experienced and resourceful (eg, he found unlikely sources of food and knew how to brave the cold) and he believed both in his own ability and in God's ability to save him. And when rescued was enormously thankful to those who found him, the SES and alpine search teams, his family and friends, all who prayed for him and also expressed thankfulness to God for preserving him.

He was lost and he was found

I wonder if you have ever been lost and then been found? We will reflect on that question at the end of the sermon – in the meantime have a think about it.

Let me suggest that everybody has been lost at some time in their life and indeed everybody has been 'found' at some time in their life.

'Oh, not me! I never get lost. I'm good at finding my way around!' you say. I doubt that, but there are more forms of lostness other than not knowing where you are located.

Oh yes! Mental or emotional loss, spiritual loss, economic loss ('We're broke, and I can't pay the electricity bill!' – that's lost – lost in the economic wilderness) loss of faith and having no idea how you are going to get out of it! How you are going to be rescued!

Today's readings all have something to say about lostness and found-ness.

So, what about Jeremiah – he's lost! Yes, he's lost! I'm betting he would have given his right arm to be lost in the wilderness, up on Mount Ephraim, well away from all his fellow citizens – oh yes that would have been bliss for him – because then, he could avoid prophesying to his own leaders and people that they were well and truly lost themselves – they had lost their way, big time. Of course, they did not think they were lost and did not appreciate being told they were a lost cause, – especially by some young prophetic upstart. Lots of lostness there!

".....my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good."

This is a fearful message for Jeremiah to relate. His lostness is measured in terms of aloneness –Being laughed at, scorned, reviled, assaulted, rejected and alone - LOST, that is, APART from being FOUND in the company of the God of

righteousness. That is not an easy or comfortable place to lose one's lostness and be FOUND - but it is the only place that makes sense of truly finding one's authentic humanity.

And what about Psalm 14. It's not a pretty Psalm! It's all about lostness. Listen for it!

¹Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.

²The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God.

³They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one.

Not one! Well Jeremiah wasn't on the scene at that point in time!

Too often we humans in this third millennia are seduced by our current leaders and our current culture and our aspirations both personal and national. And if God's plan and God's ways don't fit into that culture, our politics, my sense of earned merit then 'we are lost to you God – God you no longer exist!!!!' Lostness doesn't get much worse than this.

On the contemporary international level this sense of lostness is writ large in the ancient words of the Psalmist's last verse. Listen carefully

⁷O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!

'O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!' Blasting another people off the map does not equate to God's deliverance despite what those who rule on Mount Zion declare. If we believe that then we are even more lost than Mr Netanyahu and his hoods. This verse concludes that it is only when the **Lord** restores his people that Israel will be able to rejoice – and how does God deliver us from such terrible lostness!? Certainly not by obliterating our enemies!!!

Well, that brings us to our Gospel word.

One sheep out of a 100 lost, and one small coin lost! These parables/stories and the parable of the Lost Son which follows are outrageously unrealistic.

Imagine this. You are a helicopter pilot cattle herding in the vast outback of Australia and have successfully herded together all but one of the herd, and that one just shot through and ran off into the bush – you have a decision to make – leave the herd and chase and find the lone rebel cow out in the bush or drive the herd, minus one, into the corals a few kms away. I know what the cattle station owner would say: 'forget the bloody stupid cow and bring the rest home.' OR words to that effect!

But these two parables, of the lost sheep and the lost coin, get even more outrageously unrealistic. The shepherd with the one lost sheep in tow and the woman with her purse restored to the full 10 coins, each throw huge parties because they retrieved their lost ones! That's reckless and OTT!

Jesus uses this same extreme level of exaggeration in the parable that follows – the parable of the lost son. (For some weird reason the framers of the lectionary left this third of the lost and found parables out, because, I presume we heard it read earlier in the lectionary cycle – well yer, but this one certainly deserves repeating.) So in this third lost and found parable a father whose son has wasted everything gifted to him by his father (that in itself is extra-ordinarily outrageous in Middle Eastern culture – it is as if the son is saying to his father 'you are dead to me' – when he asks for his share of the property – such a request would actually likely lead to the demise of the son) – but, that same father welcomes his lost son home, by putting a ring on his finger, that is giving him control of the estate, remarkable - and immediately commands that the party to end all parties begin! Why would you reward such a dead beat! Because: 'this son of mine was lost, but now is found, was dead but now is alive - break out the best tucker, and the very best wine, and dance and sing and rejoice, this son of mine was lost and now is found, this son of mine was dead but now lives!'

This is a badly named parable: this is the parable of the loving, gracious merciful father extraordinaire! Not 'The Lost Son!' God is not about cutting off those who are lost he is about restoring, finding, bringing home the lost!

So, in this reading Jesus answers the outrage of the self-righteous, self-justified and self-centred religious selves: "*This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.*" I guess they are right! He does welcome and eat with those who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but that is the point the self-righteous so badly fail to understand. Our God is not even remotely interested in our display of earned merit, ie, being 'good enough' to earn God's favour. But God is interested in granting the Father's gracious mercy love and acceptance to all who recognise their lostness before the Father and their need of the Father's gifts of gracious mercy and love. That's all!

And that is exactly the point at which St Paul arrived and which he relates in his letter to Timothy. From lost in religious hatred and persecution, St Paul describes how he is found out by the gracious mercy, forgiveness and love of God. Lost and found! Listen for Paul's lostness – listen too, for his found-ness!

I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost.

Lost and found! Lost and found!

And the found-ness, that saving through Jesus, enabled St Paul to be
'an example for those who would come to believe in Jesus for eternal life.'

¹⁷To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

HYMN: TIS 179 Praise with joy the world's creator

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: WARWICK

In every place and every time,
in every relationship and every interaction,
even when we are lost, you value us and seek us,
You are God.

You are God to the poor and to the wealthy,
to the weak and to the powerful;
You are God to the believer and to the doubter,
to the religious and to the atheist;
You are God to the courageous and to the fearful,
to the fighter and to the peacemaker;
You are God to the leader and to the follower,
to the parent and to the child;

You are God to all,
and Your grace and love extends to all.
And while we may seek to keep You to ourselves,
while we may try to hoard Your blessings,

You have come to all, You are available to all,
and all who want You will find that You are there.

And so, wherever people have lost faith,
lost hope, meaning or purpose,
through their own misdirected choice,
the world's unfortunate circumstance,
or other people's malevolent actions,
we ask you to reveal your grace and salvation,
and guide us all into the way,
that gives us a way forward,
whatever we may face.

We pray:

For those who are homeless, unemployed and lonely, that you may bring them
hope and a way forward from the bewilderment and circumstances they face.

For those who are experiencing the dislocation, distress and despair of war,
especially the people of Ukraine and Gaza and the people of Nepal experiencing
civil chaos, may you bring peace and stability and your comfort to them.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our Prayer

Lord we pray today for you church and for Christians in other lands
where they are a minority let them find strength in knowing you are with them;
where they are persecuted let them find courage to continue in faithful service,
knowing that you will never leave them.

Lord we pray for the leaders of all nations who carry a heavy burden of
responsibility and we pray that all who offer their services in the leadership of the
affairs of the world may have the wisdom and courage to uphold what is right for
peace and for the survival of mankind.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our Prayer

Lord we pray for the leaders of all nations who carry a heavy burden of responsibility and we pray that all who offer their services in the leadership of the affairs of the world may have the wisdom and courage to uphold what is right for peace and for the survival of mankind.

Lord in this Season of Creation, we bring to you our thanks and praise for the beauty of creation and its infinite variety, and we pray that you would open our eyes to see all the beauty around us.

As the seasons change as Winter starts to give way to Spring help us to appreciate your greatness in giving us the different seasons, each one fulfilling our needs. Help us to your safeguard your world so that our children and future generations will benefit from the natural beauty which you have created.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We pray for those who are ill or recovering from operations, for the elderly and those who are housebound and for all who care for those with chronic needs, both professionals and volunteers, may they know the love and support they receive is a reflection of your deep eternal love for all.

And for ourselves as both members of a community of your followers and as individual believers, may we know that when we stray, are adrift, bewildered, uncertain or preoccupied; that your love will seek us out and sustain us through whatever challenges we face.

We ask these things confident in Jesus the Good Shepherd, who has loved us beyond death itself and whose Spirit abides with us for evermore. Amen

We will now say together,

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial**

and deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

(Source -Adapted from Sacredise & Ian Farthing)

HYMN: TIS 233 I will sing the wondrous story:

DISMISSAL:

Go as people of peace, stewards and healers of creation, consolers of the afflicted, and midwives of justice. In the name of Christ. Amen

BLESSING:

May God break into the places in our lives which we think are not worthy of God's entry.

May God show us the measure of God's love for us.

May we find wonder in God's transforming presence, and live into our new and transformed lives.

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.
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