

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



09 JUNE 2024

PENTECOST 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 grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all

And also with you

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our service of worship here today.

No – you don't need to have your vision and hearing re-tested, I am NOT Rev Dr Tony Floyd!!! Sadly, Tony has had Covid and is not well enough to take our service today. So I have stepped in, with a huge amount of help from Ron and from Rev Nathan Nettleton (whose sermon I have adapted) and Thomas Schuman (whose prayers I am using).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

CALL TO WORSHIP

On this day, we gather with thanksgiving in our hearts.

For God's love is ever constant in our lives.

On this day, we would talk of all that is ours.

Grace upon grace has been poured into our lives.

On this day, we would speak of what we believe.

We will sing glad songs for all that God has done.

HYMN TiS 560: All my hope on God is founded!

All my hope on God is founded;
all my trust he will renew,
through all change and chance he guides me,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
all he build with care and labour,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness last for ever,
deep his wisdom, passing thought;
splendour, light and life attend him,
beauty springing out of naught.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily the almighty giver
will his bounteous gifts bestow;
in his will our souls find pleasure,
leading us where're we go.
Love will stand
at his hand,
joy shall wait for his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Hear Christ call
one and all:
those who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges 1844-1930 *alt.*
after Joachim Neander 1650-80

PRAYER OF PRAISE, CONFESSION & ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS (from Thom Schuman)

When we are too weary to take another step on the road to the kingdom;
when our hearts are worn down by the pain always rubbing against our lives;
when we are wasting away because of fears and worries,

you come, Soul Strengtheners, stretching out your hand to hold us in your love.
When everyone else has turned their backs on us and walked away;
when we cry out in the night only to find the world has turned a deaf ear to us;
when folks think we are crazy because we believe that good can overcome evil,
love can conquer hate, hope can replace despair, you do not forsake us,
but stay at our side, Brother to all people.

When our doubts rub a callous on our souls;
when we wonder if we are able to see your kingdom emerging all around us;
when others seem to want only the worst for us,
you pull us out of harm's way, Spirit of faith and hope.

Grace upon grace are the gifts we have received from you,
God in Community, Holy in One, and we give you our thanks.

Call to Reconciliation

We know what it is like to be rejected, but we also remember turning our backs on others.

We have experienced conflict, as well as caused pain to others.

Let us confess our foolish lives to the One who seeks to forgive us on this day, and every day.

Unison Prayer for Forgiveness

Everybody else does it, Watching God, and we confess that we do as well. We listen to those whose promises are sold to the highest bidder.

We idolize celebrities as if they were teachers of ethics. We long for that one person who will make everything right, once again, once and for all.

Is it any wonder we are a disappointed people, God of Hope? Forgive us for turning our backs on you, even as you continue to stretch out your arms to us.

Forgive us for trusting in those who prove to be false, rather than having faith in your love.

Forgive us and fill us with the spirit of faith which is given to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Silence is kept

Assurance of Pardon

Do not lose heart! God seeks to strengthen our souls, filling us with forgiveness, wonder, and joy!

Glory to you, God of mercy and grace. You want only the best for us, and so we sing praises to you. Thanks be to God, we are forgiven! Amen.

THE PEACE:

The Peace of the Lord be always with you

And also with you

_____ *We share the PEACE*

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: – Brenda Grootendorst

Your Word is a lamp to our feet
and a light to our path.

Psalm 138

¹ I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart;
before the “gods” I will sing your praise.

² I will bow down toward your holy temple
and will praise your name
for your unfailing love and your faithfulness,
for you have so exalted your solemn decree
that it surpasses your fame.

³ When I called, you answered me;
you greatly emboldened me.

⁴ May all the kings of the earth praise you, Lord,
when they hear what you have decreed.

⁵ May they sing of the ways of the Lord,
for the glory of the Lord is great.

⁶ Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly;
though lofty, he sees them from afar.

⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve my life.

You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes;

with your right hand you save me.

⁸The Lord will vindicate me;
your love, Lord, endures forever—
do not abandon the works of your hands.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Mark 3: 20-35

²⁰Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹When his family^[a] heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

²²And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

²³So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house. ²⁸Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

³⁰He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”

³¹Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”

³³“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.

³⁴Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

HYMN TiS 347: We sing the praise of him who died

We sing the praise of him who died,
of him who died upon the cross;
the sinners’ hope though all deride:
for this we count the world but loss.

Inscribed upon the cross we see
in shining letters, ‘God is love’;
he bears our sins upon the tree;
he brings us mercy from above.

The cross - it takes our guilt away,
it holds the fainting spirit up,
it cheers with hope the gloomy day
and sweetens every bitter cup:

it makes the coward spirit brave
and nerves the feeble arm for fight;
it takes all terror from the grave
and gilds the bed of death with light;

the balm of life, the cure of woe,
the measure and the pledge of love,

the sinner's refuge here below,
the angels' theme in heaven above.

Thomas Kelly
1769-1855 *alt.*

SERMON: (adapted from Nathan Nettleton)

The story we heard about Jesus from Mark's gospel today is one that has caused and continues to cause an enormous amount of trouble for many Christians. It contained not one, but two, very confronting and unsettling statements. Firstly, the Jesus who usually seems to recognise no limits to forgiveness, says that there is something for which people can never have forgiveness. And secondly, the same Jesus who is so often held up as the pin-up boy for traditional family values publicly snubs his mother and his siblings and relegates them to a place of lesser priority than his allegiance to those who follow God.

So let's try to put these statements back into their context, and see what they might be saying to us.

Now Mark does an interesting thing here, something he does numerous times in his telling of the stories of Jesus. He breaks from one story, tells another, and then comes back to finish the first one. And each time Mark does this it is clear that he is wanting us to hear the two stories as commentating on one another. So, before returning to Jesus's mother and brothers, we get the story of the religious experts from Jerusalem rejecting Jesus and his ministry as demonic. The reason he can cast out demons, they said, is because he is acting under the influence of an even more powerful demon, Beelzebul, the prince of the demons.

Now in today's world, we rarely use the language of demon possession to attack those who threaten us, but in every other respect, I put it to you that what we are seeing happen in this story is something that we see happening around us all the time.

Last weekend in the AFL football was designated "Indigenous Round", and there was a great focus on celebrating the contribution of indigenous footballers to the game and to our society. But in the midst of Indigenous Round in 2015, when Adam Goodes, the most high-profile indigenous player, celebrated a goal by briefly performing an indigenous war dance towards the crowd that was booing him, all manner of controversy broke out, and angry people were queuing up to condemn him. But the reasons people were so quick to pour scorn on him were the same reasons that large sectors of the crowds had been booing him for a couple of years. Adam Goodes is a bold and uncompromising indigenous man who does not accept the script that our society has written for indigenous people, and who rejects and exposes the self-serving myths we have built up to explain and excuse the racial divide in this country. For the most part, Australians are happy to celebrate the indigenous contribution, so long as the indigenous players appear suitably grateful for the opportunities "we" have given them to make their contribution to "our" game and "our" nation. But Adam Goodes was not going to sit meekly on the shelf that we had assigned to him. He boldly used his profile in the game and the platform he had as a previous "Australian of the Year" to push a much more confronting and challenging view of the place of indigenous people here. Like Jesus, he refused to submit to the way things are or place himself subserviently under the authority of the dominant powers. And with both Jesus and Adam Goodes, when the dominant "us" felt its power and privilege questioned by such an upstart, it struck back with great hostility. He had bitten the hand that fed him, we say. He had rejected our culture and our values. He had lost the plot, lost perspective, and become an enemy of all that is good. So, we demonised him and sought to boo him into submission.

When the religious authorities label him as demonic, Jesus responded with a riddle. "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come."

We usually miss Jesus's point here. We think he is defending himself by saying that it is stupid to think that satan would ever try to cast out satan, or that satan's realm would ever be divided against itself. But in fact, he is saying that that is precisely what does happen, all the time. The clue is in the last line when he says, "If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come." The very name, satan, means the accuser. The social process of protecting ourselves by pointing the finger at others and accusing them of being the evil ones, the ones who must be rejected and purged from our midst is a demonic process. It is satan casting out satan. Rather than face the truth that there is evil in all our hearts that needs to be brought to the light and forgiven and healed, we project our evil on to others and demonise them and expel them.

And where does this demonic game take us? What does it leave us with? It leaves us with a bitterly divided humanity spiralling deeper and deeper into a violent chaos. It leaves us with a humanity that is forever divided between good and bad, clean and unclean, lawful and unlawful, sinner and saint. The divisions run ever deeper and deeper and the responses of those who feel rejected and alienated become ever more violent and chaotic. And the ultimate end of this constant divisiveness is a house that cannot stand, a humanity falling apart.

Jesus's alternative culture does not define itself over and against those it rejects and expels, but instead seeks always to hold open the doorway of love and forgiveness and inclusion to all. In the kingdom or culture of God, there are no insiders and outsiders, just one big guest list on which all of us are named, by the generous love and mercy of God. Which of course appals and scandalises those who have set themselves up as the arbiters of good and evil, of who can be insiders and who must be demonised and expelled. No wonder they see what Jesus is doing and hear what he is saying and brand him as a demonic threat to the world as they know it.

In Wednesday's Age newspaper, an article by Susan Carland, brought up as a member of the Uniting Church but now a practising Muslim, highlighted an example right now in our own country. She cited numerous examples of crude and vitriolic Islamophobia in Australia. Yet, Liberal Senator Sarah Henderson, when asked on ABC Canberra Breakfast radio, while emphasising the recent rise in antisemitism, said "there is no issue with Islamophobia", calling it a "false equivalence". Carland writes: "divisively, it needlessly pits antisemitism as being in competition with Islamophobia, instead of seeing them as concurrent scourges that are both toxic and requiring urgent attention".

Which perhaps gives us a clue as to why Jesus then suggests that rejection is an unforgivable sin. Perhaps it is unforgivable precisely because it is a rejection of forgiveness itself. You see, we hear what Jesus says and jump to the conclusion that he is saying God will never forgive this sin, but it doesn't actually say that at all. It just says that those who do this "can never have forgiveness." And in some ways, it is just a statement of the bleeding obvious: that those who utterly reject forgiveness cannot simultaneously embrace it and know themselves forgiven. If I reject food, I will starve to death, no matter how much food might be offered to me.

And with that, Mark returns us to the story he left off, and Jesus's mother and siblings turn up outside the house looking for him. And now we can hear what the gospel writer is saying when he reports that Jesus says, "Who are my mother and my brothers? Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." And we can also hear why Jesus's words shock and scandalise so many people. His refusal to validate or participate in our usual pattern of dividing ourselves up into rival groups of good and bad, "us" and "them," is so radical that he will not even recognise those most "sacred" of bonds, the ties of family and nation, as giving one in-group greater claim over his allegiance and support. It is so shocking that it is seen as anti-family and unpatriotic and demonic. But Jesus can see that it is always when we give our loyalty to some at the expense of others that we fan the flames of fear and hostility. Only when we recognise all the world as our brothers and sisters and mothers will the world be healed of its grievous wounds and love and mercy reign.

So now as we move on to pray for the world, let's resist the ultimately demonic temptation of praying for the blessing of "our people" and the punishment of "those people". For the only things that Jesus rejects and excludes are rejection and exclusion themselves. He has shone the light of truth on our deeply entrenched culture of Satan casting out Satan and called us all into one new worldwide family in which all of us, as forgiven and healed sinners are gathered as one another's brothers and sisters and mothers, for the glory of God and the life of the world. Amen

SONG: by Shirley Murray (to the tune Bunesan)

1. Who is my mother, who is my brother?
All those who gather round Jesus Christ:
Spirit-blown people, born from the Gospel
sit at the table, round Jesus
2. Differently abled, differently labeled
widen the circle round Jesus Christ:
crutches and stigmas, cultures' enigmas
all come together round Jesus Christ
3. Love will relate us--color or status
can't segregate us, round Jesus Christ:
family failings, human derailings--
all are accepted, round Jesus Christ
4. Bound by one vision, met for one mission
we claim each other, round Jesus Christ:
here is my mother, here is my brother,
kindred in Spirit, through

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OFFERING and PRAYER OF DEDICATION

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Prepared by Marg Davis

Light the candle to remember those who are not at worship with us today

We bring our prayers for others, and ourselves, before God this afternoon. Let us pray

We pray for your church in places near and far and for all who strive to live faithful lives and especially for those who are persecuted for their beliefs

We pray for church leaders and for all who minister and serve in your name.

In your beautiful, but troubled, world we pray for those who make political, economic and social decisions on behalf of others. Guide these leaders and help them to be more empathetic and inclusive. In the many countries, and regions, where innocent people's lives are being shattered by greedy desire for power and domination, we pray for peace and resolution of conflict and differences.

Loving Father, sustain all whom the world has hurt, those whose lives are denied natural growth, and those who suffer from poverty, oppression and circumstances beyond their control.

Hear our prayers for all nations and races, especially for the first peoples of our land.

Our hearts are full with many things today. Disease and death and pain and sorrow are constantly among us. We are frequently overwhelmed by the needs around us. Some need healing, some need encouragement, some need comfort, some need assurance and we all need HOPE.

We remember all who are dealing with sickness, addiction, winter homelessness and other issues.

We come in prayer for our loved ones and our friends and colleagues, and for those whom we struggle to love and we pause to pray silently for those known to us (silent prayer)

We pray for our Ormond congregation, for our life together, and for our efforts to follow in the way of Jesus.

Hear us. Hold us. Heal us. Help us.

For the sake of our Savior, our Lord, Jesus Christ who taught us to pray:

**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.**

HYMN TIS 650: Brother, sister, let me serve you

BLESSING and DISMISSAL: (from Thom Schuman)

Knowing us better than we know ourselves, God would have us go into the world.

We will go, so we might know others as our siblings, not as strangers.

Trusting us better than we trust ourselves, Jesus calls us to go and to serve others.

We will go, so that we might feed those who are hungry and bring healing to those withered by hopelessness.

Gifting us better than we gift ourselves, the Spirit fills us with all we need to be for those around us.

We will go, so that we might be those clay jars broken and poured out as grace for others.

WORD OF MISSION

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: Mardie Townsend

Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES