

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



30 JUNE 2024

PENTECOST 6



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.

“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”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge that we meet on the never ceded land of the peoples of the Kulin nation. We respect their custodianship of the land, waterways, animals and plants, their culture, stories and tradition. We respect their Elders past, present and emerging and we strive to work together with them to promote justice, reconciliation and healing.

WELCOME

Welcome to worship today. I thought I had retired properly, but perhaps not quite and I am delighted to again be among you, the people of Ormond UC. May our worship be part of that which sustains us as we grow closer in our walk with God in Christ.

HYMN TIS 28 God is our strength and refuge

CALL TO WORSHIP

God we come now in worship, not because we believe in you but because you believe in us.
May we live always in that faith that begins and ends with you.

PRAYER OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION.

Loving God, we come because we know your love, we know something of the world's beauty and we are thankful. We are thankful for our families and our community, for our well being and for our hopes and dreams.

(we pause to silently consider the richness in our lives)

We also know much of humankind's weaknesses. We know that we are often part of what is wrong. People are hungry, sick, homeless, put upon and vulnerable.

A few rich people grow richer. Too many resources are expended on the machinery of war and little goes towards reconciliation and making peace. Our planet cries out for relief. Remind us that wherever there is suffering the Spirit of Jesus is found. Help us to follow you there Lord and be your hands and feet. *(paraphrased from Robin Mann)*

AFFIRMATION.

God hears our prayers and offers us new chances, new ways to be and always love.

SCRIPTURE

read by Suzie Fergusson

Your Word O Lord is a lamp to our feet
and a light to our path

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you^[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

¹⁰ And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, ¹⁵ as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

Mark 5:21-43

²¹ When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³ He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” ²⁴ So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. ²⁵ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” ²⁹ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

³⁰ At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

³¹ “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

³⁶ Overhearing^[a] what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha*

koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”).⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

HYMN TIS 263 The bright wind is blowing

SERMON - SAME OLD, SAME OLD---OR HOPE FOR THE WORLD?

There is a sign on St Mark’s Anglican Church in Burke Rd. Canterbury. Underneath their worship times is the sentence *Making sense of life*. It appears to be their mission statement .

Making sense of life is one of the reasons why we belong to a faith community, why we come to worship and why we try to make the wider community a better place for others.

When my grand daughter had to write an essay on why people believe in God we explored it together. It was not directed at Christians specifically but at all people who acknowledge some sense of God in their lives .

The conclusion we drew was that people need a story by which to live their lives and this story both gives meaning and gives guidelines, moral precepts if you like, for living our lives in particular ways.

Indigenous people in Australia draw meaning from the Dreaming and its stories of how things came to be, in the topography of the land, the flora and fauna and how their people are to live by certain rules and mores.

Other early people understood the moon or the sun to be their gods and guides. Throughout the world religions have developed often with their own priesthoods and shamans and ways of life with particular taboos and rewards. Often as one culture was overrun by another new religions were grafted onto the older ones . We see this in our celebration of Jesus’ birth to coincide with the ancient European Yule festivals of midwinter

Nowadays in multicultural Australia we are learning how to live in peace with people of other religions especially Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and B’hai . Some municipalities run programs to help these faiths to be better understood and for people to live in harmony.

Indeed when the terrible fighting was happening in the former Yugoslavia there were Serbian Orthodox people as well as Catholics and Muslims all having earlier migrated to live in Springvale. The Mayor could see the potential for local infighting and so he approached all the religious leaders in the area and so began the first Interfaith council in a municipality. These people needed a way to live by their stories of faith without impinging on the rights of others to live by their own. This way grew from learning about each other’s beliefs, rituals and customs and rapport among the leaders filtered through to their people.

For us of course it is the story of God as shown by Jesus of Nazareth ; his birth , his teaching, his death and his resurrection frame our belief system.

Sometimes our literature reflects this story too, in the way characters live out their lives as they face the vagaries of the human condition.

All of our lectionary readings today speak of the human condition :in it’s grief, as David mourns the death of Saul and Jonathan, in it’s anxiety as a father worries about his child’s illness and in the adult woman who has hobbled through her life suffering from debilitating bleeding . Both stories in the Gospel today have a happy ending. We see the 12 year old daughter healed despite her death or near death experience and we see the restoration of the woman’s health.

In the Booker Prize winning novel by Paul Lynch, *Prophet Song* a society collapses into chaos and civil war and we follow the journey of a woman as she tries to honour and save her family. It is a very confronting story as political violence affects the family as well as the city and nation . Throughout its devastation it is simple to read Gaza , Ukraine, Syria or any other place where war holds sway and to equate the main character with every asylum seeker and refugee who has ever fled their homeland.

Eilish, the mother on whom the story is centred, ponders her predicament just before she gathers all her courage and goes aboard a flimsy boat in the attempt to find a better life somewhere. She has accepted that her husband and older son have been seized and must have been killed by the government and in the most harrowing description she has seen for herself that her barely 13 year old son has been tortured and killed. She now seeks a life for her remaining daughter and baby son. This is the conclusion she, or at least the author, comes to:

She looks to the sky watching the rain as it falls through space and there is nothing to see in the ruined yard but the world insisting on itself , the cement's sedate crumbling giving way to the rising sap beneath and when the yard is past there will remain the world's insistence , the world insisting it is not a dream and yet to the looker there is no escaping the dream and the price of life that is suffering , and she sees her children delivered into a world of devotion and love and sees them damned to a world of terror, wishing for such a world to end , wishing for the world's destruction and she looks to her infant son , this child who remains an innocent and she sees how she has fallen foul of herself and grows aghast , seeing that out of terror comes pity and out of pity comes love and out of love the world can be redeemed again, and she can see that the world does not end , that it is vanity to think the world will end in during your lifetime in some sudden event , that what ends is your life and only your life, that what is sung by the prophets is but the same song sung across time, the coming of the sword, the world devoured by fire , the sun gone down into the earth at noon and the world cast in darkness, the fury of some god incarnate in the mouth of the prophet raging at the wickedness that will be cast out of sight and the prophet sings not of the end of the world but of what has been done and what will be done and what is being done to some but not others, that the world is always ending over and over again in one place but not in another and that the end of the world is always a local event, it comes to your country and visits your town and knocks on the door of your house and become to others some distant warning, a brief report on the news , an echo of events that has passed into folklore...

That is all one sentence. The words pile up on each other relentlessly just as the events have piled up on Eilish and overtaken her living.

This way of making meaning of life is bleak. But it has the ring of truth. Over and over throughout history we see wars and suffering. Some people are lucky enough to live in peace and well- being. We would surely number ourselves as these. But only a generation ago our parents suffered through war and who knows what is ahead for our grandchildren.

If we are to liken Paul Lynch's writing to any part of Scripture it would be to Ecclesiastes , where the world- weariness of the narrator speaks of vanities or smoke or whim, the time for good and for bad, happiness and sorrow, an inevitability of the ways over which we have little control in which life unfolds, always culminating in death.

As I said earlier, the Gospel today gives us two events with happy endings. The child lives because her father was humble enough to seek Jesus' help and woman was healed because she was daring enough to touch the hem of his clothing. They grasp the opportunity given to them to encounter Jesus. Certainly we pray for healing but we do not know how this works, if it works. We certainly rely on doctors and modern medicine too. But we know we will all die. We just hope it will not be in unnecessary trauma and suffering. Our faith and the sense we make of it for our lives, the Story we live by relies less on Jesus' healing powers and more on his teaching.

So let's think about some of Paul Lynch's thesis:

Is history a repetition, over and over again, wars upon wars?

Does the wickedness pass out of sight and our caring? What would you say is the most wicked part of war, especially civil war?

We see terror on the news briefly... do we then forget it or brush it aside because there is nothing we can do?

Can the world be redeemed out of love? If so, how might we be seen as loving? Does pity beget love?

I think we find the answer in Paul writing to the people of Corinth, encouraging them to be generous where he says: *It is a question of fair balance, between your present abundance and their need.*

Here Paul is espousing Jesus' teaching. Paul is not asking for sacrificial giving but a generosity that arises from one group having more than another. It is about balancing wealth and resources so that all have sufficient.

In other words we live out our good fortune through our generosity. If we are honest we acknowledge that our wealth today has its foundations in the colonialism that took the lands of the First Peoples. No matter how hard we or our forbears may have worked it goes back to that, the land that was never ceded.

We respond from our good fortune, our abundance, when we support asylum seekers, when we stock the Little Free pantry, when we donate to causes where people have less than we have, where we advocate for justice.

Even when people have little to nothing many try to be generous. That is another aspect of life, the impetus to share, to help each other, to ease each other's burdens. We can read about it in many stories as authors explore what it is to be human. One such time is depicted in Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* where the poverty stricken woman who has been able to make a meagre stew for her own family allows all the hungry children surrounding her to scrape their fingers around the pot to have just a taste. It is told by Victor Frankle that people in concentration camps sometimes shared or gave away their scraps of food to help others. It is in that old favourite 'Little Women' when the family give away their Christmas breakfast to their hungry neighbours. We see it in Oscar Wilde's 'The Happy Prince' where the statue uses the swallow to redistribute his wealth.

Surely embedded in these stories is the Story we live by, the teachings of Jesus, of sacrificial love, even of hope in deepest darkness. Paul Lynch's novel ends with Eilish looking to the sky:

seeing only darkness knowing she has been at one with this darkness and that to stay would be to remain in this dark when she wants them to live, and she touches her son's head and she takes Molly's (her daughter) hands and squeezes them as though saying she will never let go , and she says to the sea, we must go to the sea, the sea is life.

Eilish is prepared to take the risk, to get into a flimsy boat. This is the way towards life, because to stay means certain death. This is the impetus towards life that the father in the Gospel story has for his daughter. It is the same impetus towards life that the bleeding woman has when she flouts all taboos and reaches towards and touches Jesus, if only his clothing. This is where they see life as being possible.

We see life in Christ too, through his teaching, His is the way of love. I truly believe that if enough people really and truly tried to live his way we could break the nexus of war. Of course we would need to give up some of our comfort, some of that which gives us a sense of security and definitely forgo our status.

Many of us will have sung the nineteenth century hymn : 'Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love'. Echoing that song we need to hear the Story often, slowly, softly, simply. We listen to this Story of Jesus and his love because this is the story we would live our lives by. Amen.

HYMN TIS 473 Community of Christ

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS David Northwood

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

These are our prayers today
for others and for ourselves

Let us pray

Peaceful Mind

Grateful Heart

Brave Spirit

At the centre of our soul help us to find a peaceful mind. Within the turmoil of the world and within our own lives, help us to make our minds at peace. May the peace of the Lord be in our minds at all times. Help us also to be at peace with the world as well as our own self.

Peaceful Mind.

At the centre of our soul help us to find a grateful heart. We have so many things to be grateful for. We live in a stable and peaceful country. We have not had to deal with the horrors of war for more than 50 years.

Most of us have caring families and a network of friends. We live in a rich country with social service systems. The people in this church today are probably not suffering from major financial hardship. Help us to start each day with a personal prayer of gratitude.

Grateful Heart.

At the centre of our soul help us to find a brave spirit. Despite being grateful for many things, we all have our own struggles. Some of us have health problems. Even in the most caring and loving of marriages and partnerships there are conflicts and disillusion. Sometimes there are problems with children or extended family. Help us to find the braveness of spirit to pass through these adversities.

Brave Spirit.

Psalm 34 says 'The LORD is close to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.'

Lord in our busy days, give us a sense of peace and calm. Help us not to be worried, or stressed by the problems we see around us. Instead, give us a sense of peace and calm that comes from knowing you will hold us in your arms, and resolve issues and situations that we can't.

Peaceful Mind

Grateful Heart

Brave Spirit

Amen

Let us pray 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 forever. Amen.**

HYMN TIS 587 Fold to your heart your sister and your brother.

BENEDICTION AND WORDS OF MISSION

Wherever we are may the gracious joy of God be with us,

Wherever we go may the kindly touch of Jesus be upon us

Wherever we go may the Spirit surround us .

May the presence of the Trinity bless us and keep us.

Go out to welcome the stranger, to comfort the sick and the lonely, to protect the little ones who are hurt or ignored, to know that we are all capable of redemption, to question laws that reward the strong and put down the weak.

Go to walk in Christ's ways.

TIS 779 May the feet of God walk with you.

POSTLUDE

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

Music and Words reproduced with permission under CCLI licenses

Presider: Rev Pam White

Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

Thursdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm

Phone: 0411 958 127

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

Website: www.ormondunitingchurch.org

NEWS & NOTICES