

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
FEBRUARY 12, 2023
6th Sunday after the Epiphany

The Gathering of the People of God

WELCOME & GREETING

The grace of the 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:

We acknowledge that this land is God's land, and God's Spirit dwells here. We pay our respects to the elders past, present and emerging of the Bidjegal and Gweagal people of the Eora nation, who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. This land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

CALL TO WORSHIP *(Based on Psalm 119:1-2)*

How sacred are those whose path is honest and just,
who boldly stride out in the spirit of God!

Sacred are they that pay attention to Wisdom,
seeking God's inner voice with all their heart.

Friends, be joyful in the kindness of God.

May the Spirit lead us further into the ways of costly love.

Come, let us worship.

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here

God is always here

God is with us

God is always with us

OPENING PRAYER

Most Loving and Gracious God,
we praise you and we thank you for the guidance
that you give us from day to day in your word and by your Spirit.

We thank you for choosing to dwell among us
and praise you for calling us to be your faithful people.

Bless, we pray, this time of worship and of prayer
that those who need comfort may be comforted,
those who need challenge may be challenged,
and that all of us may grow closer together as your children –
as members of the body of Christ Jesus our Lord,
in whose name we pray. Amen

HYMN: Praise to the Lord, the almighty TIS 111

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation;
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation.
Come all who hear, brothers and sisters draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who in all things is wondrously reigning
and, as on wings of an eagle, uplifting, sustaining:
have you not seen all that is needed has been
sent by his gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who will prosper our work and defend us;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend us:
ponder anew what the Almighty can do
as with his love he befriends us.

Praise to the Lord, who when darkness of sin is abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph, our best hopes confounding,
sheds forth his light, scatters the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him.
Let the Amen sound from his people again:
gladly for ever adore him.

PD; Words: Joachim Neander

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We want a faith that sets us free.
We need a way that is new and hopeful.

We don't want more laws weighing us down.

We desire a faith that sets us free to live and love.

God of extraordinary and wise ways,
ways that stretch us to the limit of creative possibilities,
we admit how difficult it can be to live our faith without
turning to rule books – new or old.

***Have mercy on us for rigid patterns of belief
often inherited and rarely questioned.***

Forgive us also for the grief we cause ourselves and others,
when we offer moral prescriptions that continue to injure and shame;
impossible expectations that keep new life from taking root and flourishing.

Renew us, O God, with your gift of compassion given to all.

***And may this unconditional compassion
be the wise rule and guide in our lives.***

We want a faith that sets us free.

We need a way that is new and hopeful.

We don't want more laws weighing us down.

We desire a faith that sets us free to live and love. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us,
Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

The old life has gone; a new life has begun.

Hear then Christ's word of grace to us:

Our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

HYMN: Draw the circle wide – online resource

Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.

Let this be our song: no one stands alone.

Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

God the still point of the circle round whom all creation turns;
nothing lost, but held together in God's gracious arms.

*Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.
Let this be our song: no one stands alone.
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.*

Let our hearts touch far horizons so encompass great and small;
let our loving know no borders, faithful to God's call.

*Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.
Let this be our song: no one stands alone.
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.*

Let the dream we dreamed be larger than we ever dreamed before;
let the dream of Christ be in us, open every door.

*Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.
Let this be our song: no one stands alone.
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.*

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Deuteronomy 30:15–20

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall certainly perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him, for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

Matthew 5:21–37

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder,’ and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment, and if you insult a brother or

sister, you will be liable to the council, and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you: Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

REFLECTION

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus is teaching us a new way to live. Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not kill,' and 'whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment."

It was my most embarrassing moment when I was year 7 in Korea. At recess my friend Hyun Min had done something I did not like. After returning to class, I decided to send a message to him. It was a scripture class. As the teacher wrote on the blackboard I wrote a message on a piece of paper, folded it into a type of plane that would sail, then tossed it in the direction of Hyun Min. Unfortunately, it made a left turn and headed toward the teacher's desk just as she turned away from the blackboard. Then with horror I remembered that I had signed the note. She picked it and read it out loud. After all these years the memory of what I wrote is still clear: "Hyun Min, you are a stupid and fool. (signed) Deok Hee." I was so embarrassed. The teacher took her Bible and turned quickly to Matthew, chapter 5, and read verse 22: "But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire." I still remember that.

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus seeks to deal not with the outer act of anger, but with the inner emotion. Everyone gets angry and anger is a normal emotion. When we are upset with someone, the best thing to do is confront that person and say, "What you did has made me angry." That is often difficult to do. We hold our angry feelings inside. We nurse those feelings of bitterness and resentment. Bitterness breeds bitterness, hatred breeds even more hatred. Allowing feelings of bitterness and hatred to irritate in our lives will eventually destroy us. Jesus wants us to overcome not only the outer act, but also the inner emotion. We also need to note that unresolved anger is a spiritual issue. There is a sense of urgency in Jesus' words. When relationships are strained, whether it's our fault or not, we are to go at once and try our best to reconcile. The sooner we are able to resolve our differences with other people the better the chance is for complete reconciliation. The longer we wait the harder reconciliation becomes.

Two sisters spent the day fighting. That evening they prepared for bed, still mad at each other. As usual, they knelt by the side of their beds for their prayers. "Dear God," the 8-year-old began, "Bless Daddy and Mommy, bless our cat and dog." Then she stopped. Her mother gently prodded, "Didn't you forget somebody?" She glared across the bed at her 6-year-old sister and added, "And, oh yes, God, bless my ex-sister."

Sometimes we wish it were that easy, don't we? But our brothers and sisters don't become 'ex's' just because we are angry. We were created for relationship. Broken relationships tear at the very reason behind our existence. "So when you are offering your gift at the altar," Jesus said, "if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister and then come offer your gift." The relationships we have with each other are that important. Our relationships with each other reflect our relationship with God. How can we expect God to forgive us when we hold hatreds and are unwilling to reconcile with someone who has wronged us in some way? Jesus says to us, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser."

Many people today struggle with forgiveness, and yet we cannot become the people Jesus intends us to become until we are able to forgive the wrongs of others and seek reconciliation. Let's think about forgiveness. What is forgiveness? Why is it so important in the process of reconciliation? Forgiveness is the most basic Christian quality. Without forgiveness, we wouldn't have Christianity as we know it. Without forgiveness, we would all be doomed to hell, condemned sinners without hope of any kind. Knowing this, a proper understanding of forgiveness will transform our relationship with God, with others and with ourselves. The meaning of the word "forgiveness" is: to dismiss, to release, to leave or abandon. We know the story of a judge that has "dismissed" the charges against a defendant in the Bible. That person is then forgiven of any wrong doing.

We know of a person that is released from an obligation, such as a loan or debt. That person is then forgiven. The word forgiveness also has the meaning to restore someone back to their original condition. The person who has been forgiven of a sin then restored to the condition of not having sinned: the sin has been dismissed and he has been released from any penalty. The case against him has been abandoned or dismissed.

Forgiving people can be one of the toughest things that Christ commands us to do, but it is something that we are commanded to do. How many times must I forgive someone who has hurt me, abused me, exploited me? That is Simon Peter's question. How many times? Would seven times be enough? Peter thought that he was being generous. After all, the rabbis of his day taught that only three times were required. Peter was taking what the rabbis commanded, multiplying it by two, and adding one more for good measure! Seven times, Peter thought, should be plenty enough forgiveness. But it was not enough for Jesus. In answer to how many times we should forgive Jesus said, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven." What Jesus is trying to say here is, forgiveness is limitless and unconditional. Jesus says; forgive others not seven times, not seventy times seven, but limitlessly and infinitely.

We all know that God's love is unconditional love. God's love is not based on our performance. The Bible says, "Christ died for us while we were still sinners." It doesn't matter who we are, where we come from, what we have done. God loves us just as we are. God doesn't say, "Oh, he's such a fine man! Look at all he has accomplished! Because he has been so good, I will show my love on him." No! God's love has nothing to do with our goodness; God's love has nothing to do with our performance. God's love is unconditional. In the same way, God tells us that forgiveness is also unconditional. God wants us to go to those who wronged us with unconditional forgiveness as God has forgiven us without any conditions. It doesn't matter who they are, where they come from, what they have done wrong to us.

We all know that love is the centre of our Christian faith. This morning, I want let you know that forgiveness is also the heart of Christian faith. Forgiveness is one of Jesus' most important teachings. It is at the centre of everything we believe about Christ. Let's remember this. Jesus came to the world for the forgiveness of our sins, and died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Do you remember what Jesus prayed just before he died on the cross? Jesus prayed the prayer of forgiveness for those who nailed Jesus on the cross, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

As God commands us to love one another, God also commands us to forgive others. This morning, I want you to realize that we are commanded to forgive. This is not just a suggestion or an option that we can consider; it is a command from God. And why is forgiveness commanded? After all, a lot of people might think that so long as we are

holy and religious, it doesn't really matter how you conduct your personal relations. But how we relate to others is directly tied to our relation with God. If we know God's love then we can know love for others. The opposite is also true, if you do not love, you do not know God because God is love. This is true for forgiveness. Whoever knows true forgiveness knows God because God is all about forgiveness. If you do not know how to forgive, you do not know God because God is the source of all forgiveness. If you have been truly forgiven by God for your many sins, then you will be better able to understand how to forgive others the sins that they have committed against you. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, is our prayer in the Lord's Prayer.

Today Our Old Testament reading Deuteronomy 30 is about having right relationships. And in our Gospel reading Matthew 5, Jesus shows us a new way of being human, of being peacemakers, of reconciling conflict, of telling the truth, as Christians how should we handle conflict within the Body of Christ, what it means to live in ways that restore relationships and strengthen community.

Brothers and sisters, usually reconciliation is hard work. Reconciliation cost Jesus his life. Surely you and I can seek to be reconciled with those who have done us wrong. But someone has to take the initiative, just as God took the initiative with us. Jesus says to us this morning, "if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister and then come offer your gift." It reminds us that reconciling with others and having a good relationship with others is so important in our Christian lives. Isn't it time for you to be reconciled? Amen.

HYMN: Jesus Christ is waiting TIS 665

Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the streets;
no-one is his neighbour, all alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am lonely too.
Make me, friend or stranger, fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is raging, raging in the streets;
where injustice spirals and real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am angry too.
In the Kingdom's causes let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is healing, healing in the streets;
curing those who suffer, touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I have pity too.
Let my care be active, healing just like you.

Jesus Christ is dancing, dancing in the streets;
where each sign of hatred he, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I should triumph too.
Where good conquers evil let me dance with you.

Jesus Christ is calling, calling in the streets;
“Who will join my journey? I will guide their feet.”
Listen, Lord Jesus, let my fears be few.
Walk one step before me; I will follow you.

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

Generous God, you have given us life,
a place to live in, and people to live with.
Open our eyes to each other and to all our brothers and sisters,
especially the poor, the oppressed, the alienated.
Make us humble enough to help and comfort them,
so that your love and justice and peace may come to them.
We make bold to consecrate ourselves and our gifts
to you and to the service of others,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Welcoming God, we pray for the Church around the world,
that it might be a home for all, a place of welcome for all people.
We thank you for all the people we meet in this church
and in your church beyond these doors.
We thank you for all those who pray and those who laugh;
for those who teach and those who sing,
for those who look like us and those who are different,
for those who are young and those who are older.

We praise you for the diversity we have –
the uniqueness that each member of your body brings
to the whole, and we ask that you might help us always
to be understanding and loving towards all
who call upon your name – and also to those who do not.

Healing God.

Give healing to those who are suffering,
because of ill health of body and mind,
who are grieving because someone they love is with you,
who are experiencing injustice, who are wracked by guilt.

Loving God.

Give love to those who feel unloved;
resurrection to those who need new life and to begin again.
Give encouragement to those who are tired out
with hard work or struggling financially,
with no job and little in the way of benefits,
who struggle with dysfunctional lives and families.

God of Power and peace.

In the power of your Holy Spirit, give peace to those who are violated-
by war, by abuse, by power, by oppression of any kind.

Today in silence, let us remember Syria and Turkey in our prayer. Last Monday two earthquakes caused enormous destruction in Turkey and Syria. Currently, more than 21 thousand people have died and many thousands more are injured or missing. Now in silence, let us pray for the people of Turkey and Syria.

“Almighty God, we pray for the people of Turkey and Syria, for the victims, the injured, and all those affected by the devastating earthquake. We pray for first-responders, and all those working tirelessly to rescue survivors from beneath the rubble. May God's peace sustain their efforts. Empower our church to show radical love for our immediate neighbours who are grieving the loss of life, beauty, and peace in Syria and Turkey. Let us not turn away, but help us be your hands and feet to love those who are suffering and bear witness to your presence with them. 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 in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.***

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

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

INVITATION

Come to this table:
you who have much faith,
and you who would like to have more;
you who have been to this sacrament often,
and you who have not been for a long time;
you who have tried to follow Jesus,
and you who have failed.
Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

Jesus said,
"I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

HYMN: Let us talents and tongues employ TIS 537

Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy;
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Christ is able to make us one,
at the table he sets the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share;
God-Immanuel everywhere.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

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PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also be with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, always and everywhere,
to give thanks to you, the true and living God.
Endless is your mercy and eternal is your reign.
All creation rejoices in your radiant splendour.

You made a covenant with your people
and declared your purpose of justice and love.
When all things were ready, you sent your Son to be our Saviour.
In words and deeds he proclaimed your kingdom,
and obeyed your will even to death on the cross.

Through his mighty resurrection
he overcame sin and death to set the whole creation free.

Therefore with saints and angels and with all the choirs of heaven,
we join in the song of eternal praise:

***Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.***

Hosanna in the highest.

We praise you, God, that on the night in which he was betrayed
our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,
'Take and eat. This is my body, given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me'.

After supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying,
'This cup is the new covenant of my blood,
shed for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in remembrance of me'.

***As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

Therefore, gracious God, with this bread and this cup
we remember that our Lord offered his life for us.
Believing the witness of his resurrection and ascension,
we look for his coming in glory,
and our sharing in his great and promised feast.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit,
that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us the body and blood of Christ
and that we may live to your praise and glory
with all your saints in light.

Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.

Join our prayers and the prayers of all your people
on earth and in heaven
with the intercessions of Christ, our great high priest,
***through whom, with whom, and in whom,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all worship and honour are yours,
almighty God and Father,
for ever and ever. Amen.***

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

THE COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Almighty God,
you provide the true bread from heaven,
your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Grant that we who have received
the sacrament of his body and blood
may abide in him and he in us,
that we may be filled with the power of his endless life,
now and forever. Amen.

The Sending Forth of the People of God
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HYMN: Here I am, Lord TIS 658

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.

I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord; is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.*

I the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord; is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame;
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.

Finest bread I will provide till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord; is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.*

BLESSING

Go now, beloved,
to follow the love of God
to be surprised by God's wonder
to lift your voice for love and compassion.

Believe that you are people on a mission of healing and grace.
Feel God's encouragement
to be a blessing as you offer blessings
with your heart and hands.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always. *Amen.*

SENDING SONG: Father, bless us as we go TIS 781

Father, bless us as we go,
Jesus, walk beside us.
Holy Spirit, guide us.
Father, bless us as we go,
Jesus, walk beside us.
Holy Spirit, guide us.