

**KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH – ORDER OF SERVICE MARCH 19, 2023
AFTER VISION SHIFTS**

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us praise God who meets our needs and leads us to places of tranquillity and rest. Let us praise God who comforts us and replaces our fears with overflowing love. Shepherd God, we praise you for enfolding us in your great love. We rejoice in the knowledge that your care for us is so great that we lack nothing. You provide for all our needs, even the strength to cope in times of darkness and distress. The depth of your care for us is revealed in the person of Jesus, who was prepared to go to the cross to prove that your goodness and mercy is more powerful than evil and death. In response to these many blessings, we have gathered together in this, your house, praying that this time of worship will be a fitting response to the many blessings we receive from you. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

LIGHT THE CANDLE

God is here - God is always here – God is with us - God is always with us

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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. We acknowledge that this land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal land.

SING: Here in this place TIS/474

Here in this place new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away,
see, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,
brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken
gather us in, the blind and the lame;
call to us now, and we shall awaken,
we shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery;
we are the old, who yearn for your face;
we have been sung throughout all of history,
called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,
gather us in, the proud and the strong;
give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven light years away,
but here in this space, the new light is shining,
now is the kingdom, now is the day.
Gather us in, and hold us forever;
gather us in, and make us your own;
gather us in, all peoples together,
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Jesus, servant King and Light of the world you penetrate the darkness of the world with your love and your life, graciously enlightening us in ways which enable us to see the world and our neighbours as you see them. We confess, however, that there are times when we choose to reject the gift of your insight, preferring to 'close our eyes' to the pain and suffering which are daily experiences for so many people.

When selfishness blinds us to the needs of others;

Jesus, Light of the world, forgive us.

When our insensitivity blinds us to the hurt we cause others;

Jesus, Light of the world, forgive us.

When our prejudices blind us to the equal dignity and worth of others;

Jesus, Light of the world, forgive us.

When our pride blinds us to our own faults;

Jesus, Light of the world, forgive us.

When the lure of materialism blinds us to the poverty of others;

Jesus, Light of the world, forgive us.

Jesus, Light of the world, help us to walk in your light so that goodness, righteousness, and truth are made visible as we reflect your love and your mercy in and through all we say and do. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news! "Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light". Know that we can "live as children of the light" (Ephesians 5: 8) because in Jesus, Light of the world, we are enlightened; we are healed; we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

PEACE

SING: The life of Jesus shows a way – tune TIS/375 verses 1,3,5

The life of Jesus shows a way
of living life in love each day.
He lived with kindness, but was strong
in striking out against all wrong.
We seek to live in harmony,
but try to counter tyranny.

The life of Jesus is a voice,
when doubt engulfs us, to rejoice
in beauty of the world around,
compassion which is so profound.
We seek to live in harmony;
make joy a shared reality .

In Jesus Christ, God's call to life
is lived amidst horrific strife;
God, as the source of love, is known
in Jesus Christ, though not alone;
we also seek our destiny
To let love have supremacy.

George Stuart; Singing a new song 30.

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READING FROM THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES: Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

SING PSALM 23: The Lord is my Shepherd TIS/659

The Lord is my shepherd,
and I want to follow
wherever he leads me,
wherever he goes.
Over the mountains,
the waters and by-ways,
valleys and highways
he's waiting for me.

I want to go to meet him there,
to lay myself down in his love.
The Lord is my shepherd
and I want to follow
wherever he leads me,
wherever he goes.

And while on the journey
to where we are going
he promised to be there
to help us along,
and over the mountains
we'll walk on together,
to know all the wonders
he's given to me.

I want to go to meet him there,
to lay myself down in his love.
The Lord is my shepherd
and I want to follow
wherever he leads me,
wherever he goes.

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READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES: John 9 : 1 - 41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had

said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

REFLECTION:

The Twenty-Third Psalm is one of the most powerful chapters in the Bible. For 25 centuries, it has crossed the barriers of time, language, and culture to become one of the best-known and most-loved passages in the Bible. Psalm 23 is relatively short. The six verses of the Psalm contain only 117 words and is easily memorized. In fact, you could probably repeat the entire Psalm from memory. I know of a hymn based on Psalm 23, "The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want; he makes me down to lie~~" Psalm 23 is a very powerful chapter and there are beautiful verses in that chapter.

Around 30 years ago, when I was in Korea, I worked as a youth worker at a church in my hometown Dae Jeon. I was just completing my evening meal when the phone rang. The call was to let me know that Jeong Min's father had taken a turn for the worse. Jeong Min was one of my youth group members. Jeong Min was calling and asking if I could come to the hospital. As I drove to the hospital, I thought about the man I was going to visit. Jeong Min's father had unusual abilities and energies. He had started working with one company, but eventually formed his own company and became very successful. Perhaps, it was that drive and determination which led him to a heart attack at the age of 52. When I arrived at the hospital, the doctor was telling the family that the situation was not good. Jeong Min's father was in serious condition, he was no longer awake and his condition was weakening. I walked into that room with the family and as we stood around the bed, Jeong Min's mother was holding my hand and she asked me if I would say a word of prayer. We all joined hands and bowed our heads. For some reason, instead of saying a prayer, I simply began repeating the best known passage in the Bible. I said;

The Lord is my shepherd:
I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters ...

Somehow, those words were reaching into the heart and mind of Jeong Min's father. Even though his eyes were still closed and the heart monitor indicated that he was growing progressively weaker, he began to repeat that Psalm with me. His voice was weak, but there was no doubt that he knew that Psalm... I can't forget that moment how Psalm 23 was so powerful in that difficult situation.

As we review this familiar Psalm this morning, I want to look at the promises within which make this Psalm so meaningful in our lives. There are many promises within this Psalm, but there are some specific promises which strengthen us and give us the courage to face whatever comes our way in life.

Psalm 23 is about God's care and concern for us. I don't know if you have ever been in areas where the shepherd stays with his sheep. If you have, you have probably noticed that the sheep are very calm and content when the shepherd is present. They know the shepherd is there and that he is interested in them. The shepherd is one who cares for them ... The shepherd provides them with food and water ... The shepherd protects them from wild animals in the field ... The shepherd nurses and cares for them when they are sick ... They know the shepherd is watching over them and they are calm and content. The shepherd is one who cares for his sheep because they are valuable to him. From early in the morning until late at night, the shepherd keeps a watchful eye on his sheep because they are important to him.

The promise of this Psalm is that God keeps a watchful eye over us because we are important to him. Yet, one of the deepest tragedies of life is that there are so many people who feel unimportant, worthless, unappreciated, unloved. We all need to feel like there is a sense of worth or value in our lives. It doesn't matter whether we are rich or poor ... whether we are young or old ... whether our name is recognized by everyone or no one. We need to realize that we are someone who is pretty important simply because we belong to the Shepherd of all life. We are important to God and when we recognize his love and care and concern for us, then we will truly know that he is, indeed, our Shepherd. I also want you to know that God not only love and care and concern for us but also understands us. In the Psalm, the shepherd is pictured as knowing and understanding his sheep. He understands that they are afraid of running water because of their heavy wool. Understanding this, the shepherd does not take his sheep to a running river or stream for water. Instead, he searches out and guides his flock to a quiet pool where they can drink. The shepherd understands that the sheep can be suffered by parasites and insects. Understanding this, he carries a special oil or ointment to rub on their noses and the insides of their ears. This keeps the sheep from being annoyed by the insects and parasites. The shepherd understands that sheep are always seeking for food. Understanding this, he searches out green pastures where they can have plenty to eat. The shepherd understands his sheep and tries to meet their needs. The sheep have learned to depend upon the shepherd because he understands them. He is looking out for their welfare. He is interested in them. It is the same with God. He knows our needs. He is our shepherd and he understands everything about us.

Many many years ago, there was a car Model-T Ford stopped in the middle of the road. The driver couldn't get it started no matter how hard he tried to turn on the engine. Just then a limousine pulled up behind him, and a man stepped out from the back seat and said, "Can I help you?" The man looked over the stranger and said, "Yea, I have some problems with my car. I have spent already more than 2 hours on the road to fix it. But I can't find the problems." "Can I have a look?" the stranger said. "Yes, but I don't want you to waste your time. I couldn't fix it even though I am very good at fixing the car. But if you want, you can have a look", the man said. The man didn't trust the stranger. After tinkering for a few moments the stranger said, "Now try it!" Immediately the engine started. The well-dressed stranger then identified himself as Henry Ford. "I designed and built these cars," he said, "so I know what to do when something goes wrong."

God is our creator. He made us. He knows everything about us. He knows the problems we face. He knows the fears which leave us trembling like little children. And of course he knows how to fix us when we have problems and fears in our life. I don't know what kind of problems or difficult situations you have. But remember this. God is your creator. He is the one who made you. He knows everything about you. He knows how to fix your problems, difficult situations, and fears.

Let's look at the story of John's gospel reading for today. This story is about a man who was born blind. He had never seen a sunrise or the beauty of a flower. He hadn't seen the face of his parents or another human being and yet..... he never complained. He was alive but his world was darkened without sight. He never chose to be born blind but his blindness left him with no choice but to beg. But the good news is his situation was about to change forever. Friends, I wonder if there is anyone here this morning who has been going through a rough time in life? We don't choose problems but they come to us. Some of them are heavy and unbearable and there may not seem to be a way out; but I want to encourage you because with God all things are possible. Just like Jesus came to the

blind man, I want you to believe that he is coming and on his way to you! All you need is faith in the one who is able to bless you above and beyond what you can think or imagine. In the story, we are told that while others walked away, Jesus stopped to speak with the blind man. While others were ignoring his suffering, God was working out a plan to bless the man through his suffering! Here is the beauty about this story my friends - His blindness became the reason or a vehicle for the salvation of his soul. Think about this – if he had not been blind he would never had met Jesus. In like manner, I am suggesting that God can turn your ashes into a blessing. Just like Jesus brought light into the life of that blind man, he can do the same for you and me. Friends, if you have a sickness, financial problem, family problem, fear or even loneliness, I want to assure you that the Lord is coming to you. There is no one who understands your grief and pain more than the Savior. He has been there and done that and is willing and ready to heal your every brokenness.

Brothers and sisters in Christ! Know that God is the shepherd. Know that he is nearby. Know that he loves you. Know that he will come when you call to him in prayer, when you are frightened, or anxious, or in pain. Then you will be able to affirm, with the psalmist, "The Lord is MY shepherd...Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever." The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is your shepherd. The Lord is our shepherd forever and ever. Amen.

SING: Lord let me see TIS/681

Lord let me see, see more and more,
see the beauty of a person, not the colour of the skin,
see the faces of the homeless with no-one to take them in,
see discouragement because she'll never win:
see the face of our Lord in the pain:
Lord let me see.

Lord let me hear, hear more and more,
hear the sounds of great rejoicing, hear a person barely sigh;
hear the ring of truth, and hollowness of those who live a lie;
hear the wail of starving people who will die;
hear the voice of our Lord in the cry:
Lord let me hear.

Lord let me care, care more and more,
care for those who feel the loneliness, for those who have no say,
care for friends who have no job and find it hard to face the day,
care for those with whom we sing and work and pray:
and in care Jesus Christ will be found:
Lord let me care.

Lord let me learn, learn more and more,
learn that what I know is just a speck of what there is to know;
learn from listening to my neighbour when I'd rather speak and go;
learn that as we live in faith and trust we grow;
learn to see, hear and care, with our Lord:
Lord let me learn.

Lord let me love, love more and more,
love the loveless and the fragile, help them be what they can be,
love the way that I would like them to be looking after me;
for to know you is to love them and be free,
and in love Jesus Christ will be found:
Lord let me love.

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OFFERING:

OFFERING PRAYER:

God of grace and truth; in Jesus, Light of the world, you have fulfilled your promise to be with us when we walk through the darkest valley. Our gratitude for this evidence of your Love for the world is made visible in these our offerings. Bless them and us, we pray, as We seek to do what is pleasing to you through our worship, witness and service made in Jesus' name. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

Peaceful God,

We hold in our silent prayers the people on our hearts in need of rest and sustenance at this time.

(Silent prayer)

God of light,

We hold in our silent prayers the people on our hearts who need guidance at this time.

(Silent prayer)

God of all comfort,

We hold in our silent prayers the people on our hearts who are grieving and afraid.

(Silent prayer)

Welcoming God,

We hold in our silent prayers the people on our hearts who are weighed down by conflict and opposition.

(Silent prayer)

Jesus, Light of the World,

Send forth your goodness and hope into all the world.

God who illuminates the world, today we remember the promise told in the book of Isaiah, "the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. On those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them has the light shone bright." We thank you for these words of revelation and today we pray for all who feel themselves living in darkness. We pray for all who can see no way ahead because of the darkness all around them. Today we pray for light to dawn. We pray for your light of love and truth to break into the lives of all the people of the earth. May the light of life bring life to all.

We pray at this time for the Secretary of PRC, Richard Hanna. May you give him the strength and tools to do this important work in this Presbytery.

We pray all this in your name. Amen.

SING: A man of ancient time and place **Tune TIS/654**

A man of ancient time and place
with foreign speech and foreign face,
reveals the glory, power and grace
of costly, unexpected love.

A rabbi, schooled in Moses' Law,
a male, amending Herod's flaw,
arouses wonder, rage and awe
with costly, unexpected love.

By teasing word and healing deed,
a leper touched, an outcast freed,
he bears the fruit and plants the seed
of costly, unexpected love.

The cost we barely can surmise
when, lifted up before our eyes,
the face of God we recognise
in crucified, unfathomed love.

May faith and hope within us grow,
the way of Christ to tell and show,
and may the Spirit breathe and blow
in costly, unexpected love.

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BLESSING:

Listen to Jesus' words,
take seriously what he says,
let his light fill your being and guide your steps.
And may God's beauty and love live deep within us,
be the joy we share between us,
and the hope that goes before us.
Go in peace.

SENDING SONG: Like a candle

Seasons 3-20 Verses 1,4 & 5

Like a candle burning wildly,
raging soft against the night,
spark that leaps to clear the shadows
sending warm disturbing light.
We are called to live the passion,
hope stands strong against all pain.
For it's only in the burning
that the candle shows its flame.

See the hope that burns in darkness,
show compassion, strong and kind,
bind the hurt and broken hearted,
be God's hands and voice and eyes.
Sing a new song ev'ry sunrise,
climb to places out of reach.
walk in freedom of God's Spirit,
as we die so we shall live.

We are called to live the passion,
hope stands strong against all pain.
For it's only in the burning
that the candle shows its flame.

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