

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

April 23, 2023

Easter 3

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

Lift your voices to God.

We call on the One who promises to hear us.

In life, in death, in every moment, God deals graciously with us.

We rejoice in the One who saves us.

We will break the Bread of life in thanksgiving to God.

We will lift up the Cup of salvation, drinking deeply from it.

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here

God is always here

God is with us

God is always with us

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, we gather as your people.

We come to walk a journey together, to talk and to share along the way,
to feast on bread and wine, to meet and to know Jesus.

Help us to marvel at all that Jesus has done for us. Amen.

HYMN: Let us sing to the God of salvation TIS 52

Let us sing to the God of salvation,
let us sing to the Lord our rock!
Let us come to his house with thanksgiving,
let us come before the Lord and sing!

(Refrain)

*Praise our Maker, praise our Saviour,
praise the Lord our everlasting King.
Every throne must bow before him,
God is Lord of everything!*

In his hands are the earth's deep places
and the strength of the hills is his;
and the sea is the Lord's for he made it,
by his hands the dry land was formed.

(Refrain)

Let us worship the Lord our Maker,
let us kneel to the Lord our God;
for we all are the sheep of his pasture,
he will guide us by his powerful hand.

(Refrain)

Let today be the time when you hear him!
May our hearts not be hard or cold,
lest we stray from the Lord in rebellion,
as his people did in time of old.

(Refrain)

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

***Risen Lord, we are sorry
that we fail to recognise you in our midst,
that we are too preoccupied with ourselves.
We are sorry that we let you down,
that we feast and don't invite others to share with us.
We are sorry that we welcome friends but not always the stranger,
or anyone who makes us feel uncomfortable.
Forgive us, Lord.***

***Help us to be generous people,
our church, our homes – and our hearts – always places of welcome.
Amen.***

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.

Those who believe in him are not condemned.

Here 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: Jesus Came Bringing Us Seasons 3 – 7

Jesus came bringing us hope.

Jesus came bringing us hope.

Jesus came bringing us hope.

Hallelujah for evermore!

Jesus came showing God's peace.

Jesus came showing God's peace.

Jesus came showing God's peace.

Hallelujah for evermore!

Jesus came bringing us joy.

Jesus came bringing us joy.

Jesus came bringing us joy.

Hallelujah for evermore!

Jesus came showing God's love.

Jesus came showing God's love.

Jesus came showing God's love.

Hallelujah for evermore!

Jesus came showing justice.

Jesus came showing justice.

Jesus came showing justice.

Hallelujah for evermore!

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 116:1–4, 12–19

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord, “O Lord, I pray, save my life!” What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord; I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones. O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

Luke 24:13–35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is

almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

REFLECTION

“Coming Alive To Christ”

There are many kinds of “Good News and Bad News” joke. This is one of them. Two old men had been best friends for years, and they both lived to their early 90’s, when one of them suddenly fell deathly ill. His friend came to visit him on his deathbed, and they looked back about their long friendship. And the dying man’s friend asked, “Listen, when you die, do me a favour. I want to know if there is a golf course in heaven.” The dying man said, “We’ve been friends for years, this I’ll do for you.” And then he died. A couple of days later, his surviving friend was sleeping when he heard his friend’s voice. The voice said, “I’ve got some good news and some bad news. “What is good news?” “Well,” there is a beautiful 36 hole golf course in Heaven, and you’ll have 24 hour access with your own personal caddy.” “Wow! What’s the bad news?” “You’re due to tee-off this Sunday at around 10:30 in the morning.” This is good news that through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross we are saved, we have new life. This is the Good News that the Bible tells us today. So if we don’t understand or misunderstand the Bible, we can’t realize the really joyful good news in the Bible. The tradition to which we belong, the Protestant tradition begun by Martin Luther believes most strongly that we meet God - that we meet Christ - in the word of scripture - in study - and in prayer.

The scripture reading that we read today speaks about these things. It is the story of how two men, on Easter Sunday, set out on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus - a distance of about seven miles - were met by a stranger going along the same road - and began to speak to him about all that had occurred in the Holy City during the previous week. Doubt and disappointment, discouragement and despair: these are emotions that are common to all of us at some point in our lives. Challenging things are happening in our world, and it is difficult to understand why. Loss of a job, loss of a loved one, divorce, illness, even the COVID situation we face today, and you know few days ago a paramedic young father was killed in Campbelltown without any reason, any of these things and more can throw us into a panic and fill our hearts with anxiety and fear. That is exactly the situation in which we find Cleopas and his friend in today’s Gospel story. Followers of Jesus, they had believed in the new life he had promised

them. Their hearts were filled with joy and anticipation as they looked forward to hearing more of his word and to being witnesses again and again to his good works, to his miracles. Fed in body, mind, and spirit by their fellowship with Jesus and with other believers, their lives had become filled with a new joy, and even all that they had to give up to follow him was as nothing compared to what they now had. They thought it would go on forever. But now all their hopes and dreams were as dead as Jesus. The events of the past few days, ending with the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, had beaten every last bit of hope from them. They thought there was nothing left to do but get out of Jerusalem and go to another place, perhaps to pick up the pieces of their former lives and begin again; to turn their backs on all that had seemed so expectant and hopeful, and walk the seven miles on the road to Emmaus. The stranger on the road responded to their grief, their dejection - their shock and horror - regarding what had happened - how Jesus, a good man, a prophet, a man powerful before God and all the people - had been crucified and buried - and how his body had disappeared from the tomb - by taking them on a journey through the law and the prophets. In that journey he showed them how the scriptures foretold all that Jesus did, and all that he suffered, even how he would die – and what purpose it served.

The scriptures are an amazing thing - Moses and David, Isaiah and Malachi, Jeremiah and Ruth, all speak of God's anointed one - of God's suffering servant - they speak too of God's purpose and plan for the world how the world began - and how it will end. The scriptures are a way to come to know God, to come to know Christ, and it was through them, one night many years ago now – as I was reading the gospel of Luke that I first invited him to be my Lord and my Saviour. I met Christ through the scriptures, I came to know him by what they said about him, and I wanted for myself the forgiveness and the joy of which he spoke, the strength and the hope which he offered, the wholeness and the salvation for which he came - and for which he died and rose again. The stranger who walked with the two men on the road to Emmaus spoke of these things. He taught them about the mind of God, and the purpose of God, and how Jesus fit in with it all. In the record of that encounter, we are told that their hearts burned within them as this stranger talked to them about these things, as he "opened the Scriptures to them"

Our tradition teaches us that the reading of scripture, and the study of scripture, and the proclamation of the message of the scriptures is the primary way in which we meet God, the primary way in which we meet Christ. Prayer is equally important however. While we get to know Christ, while we meet him, through the Word of God, we communicate with him, we conduct our relationship with him through prayer. I can't number the times that prayer to the God who I have met through the scriptures has warmed my heart, calmed my fears, and given me a basic assurance about the future. In prayer I felt God's Spirit touch me - in prayer I have heard him tell me what I should do - and what I should not do - in prayer I felt his forgiveness and experienced a joy that words cannot express. There are hundreds of prayers in the Bible. For every mood,

for every need, for every feeling that we experience we can find a matching mood, a matching need, a matching feeling described in the Bible. Prayer is so precious. In it, the God we meet, the Christ we meet becomes ever more real to us, his presence ever more immediate.

Scripture, study, and prayer are ways in which we meet God and get to know him better, ways in which we meet Christ and come ever closer to him. Without them we have very little, without them we cannot expect to know God, to encounter God, to communicate with God. But the story of the two disciples who walked on the road to Emmaus that first Easter Day tells us something more about how to get to know Christ - something more about how we might recognize him – how we might encounter him. It speaks to us of how Christ walks with us on our journey - and how, in the breaking of bread he comes to be known to us. In the Mid-East at the time of Jesus, and even to this day, to eat a meal with someone - to have a person into your house and to sit at table with them, is the greatest compliment - the greatest kindness that one can show. It is an act of profound intimacy - an act of trust - of honour - of friendship. It was in that act - and specifically in the breaking of bread and in the prayer of thanks given over that bread - that the two men - whose minds were clouded by anxiety and grief as they walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, had their eyes opened, that they recognized that the stranger who was with them, - the stranger who they had invited into their home was the risen Christ, and having recognized Christ, they are filled with joy and excitement and return to Jerusalem to give witness to the disciples and to bring them the assurance that they needed.

I believe that this story is telling us that we too come to recognize Christ, that we communicate with Christ whenever we gather together, whenever we meet with and share with another person our joy and our grief and offer prayer over the bread we break together or the cup that we lift up and share with each other. Jesus said - that where two or three gather in his name there he would be. When we gather in moments of intimacy, when we share the greatest gifts that we can share with one another: our homes - our tables - our bread and wine - Christ comes among us.

I have had great moments in reading scripture. I have had great moments in prayer, moments in which I have been very much aware of the presence of God, very much aware of his plan and his purpose for me, very much aware of the closeness that he has to me - the love he has for me. If we would meet God - if we would encounter Christ and recognize him in that encounter, we need to read the scriptures and meditate them, listen to them being proclaimed - at Church and where we gather, and pray over them with others. And the God who came to me and met me and touched me in the scriptures and the prayer will also come to you and meet you and will show you his great plan and the love he has for you. **Amen.**

HYMN: Christ the Lord is risen today TIS 370

Christ the Lord is risen today: Hallelujah!
Let the whole creation say: Hallelujah!
Raise your joys and triumphs high: Hallelujah!
Sing now, heaven, and earth reply: Hallelujah!

Love's redeeming work is done: Hallelujah!
fought the fight, the battle won: Hallelujah!
vain the stone, the watch, the seal: Hallelujah!
Christ has burst the gates of hell: Hallelujah!

Lives again our glorious king; Hallelujah!
where, O, death, is now your sting? Hallelujah!
Once he died our souls to save; Hallelujah!
where your victory, O grave? Hallelujah!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Hallelujah!
following our exalted Head; Hallelujah!
made like him, like him we rise: Hallelujah!
ours the cross, the grave, the skies: Hallelujah!

PD ; words: Charles Wesley

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

God, like the disciples at Emmaus, we offer what we have.
They offered their company, their table, their bread.
We invite you to be with us, Jesus,
as we offer you our love, our devotion, these gifts.
May our eyes be opened to your holy presence among us,
now and always. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

We pray for all who are hungry, who do not have enough to live with dignity.
May they find generosity and inclusion in their local Christian communities.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for all who live in loneliness or isolation.
May they know friendship and community.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are abused in any way, whose homes or neighbourhoods or places of work or study are places of fear, not of safety.
May they be strengthened and freed from abusers and fear.
May they find your good plans for them and hope in you.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for those with disabilities and those who feel alone.
We pray too for all who are shunned, from whom people turn away.
Please help them to be included and to know that they are loved by you
and that you have good plans for hope for them.
God in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We also pray for all who have been displaced,
who live in exile and in fear of losing everything they have ever known.
May they know your peace and strength in their lives.
God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

In Silence, let us pray for the sick and the suffering
who are known in this congregation.
Especially we remember, Prema and her family, Brian & Rhonda,
all of our elderly people, and all others who are not well.
(Silence)

God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer. 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.***

INVITATION

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him,
who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.

Jesus said,

“I am the bread of life;
Those who come to me shall not hunger,
and those who believe in me shall never thirst.”

COMMUNION HYMN:

Be known to us in breaking bread TIS 514

Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Saviour, abide with us, and spread
your table in our heart.

There share with us in love divine;
your body and your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine,
be our immortal food.

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.

We give thanks with joyful hearts.

Dispeller of doubts, source of our faith,

we praise you with wonder for caring for us so deeply.

We praise you, O God, for raising Jesus from the dead,

and for this great assurance of your love for us

which we experience in Jesus and through the power of your Spirit.

With joy over prophecies fulfilled, and promises carried out,

we join with faithful people of every time and place to give glory to you:

***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 waved our palms and cried “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday,
we held our breath and fear clutched our hearts once more
with the words “Crucify him” on Good Friday;
so our relief on Easter Day was evident
in our eagerness to join in the acclamation that “Christ is risen.”
Today, we remember those travellers on the road to Emmaus,
who recognised Jesus in the blessing and breaking of the bread.
Like them, we receive Jesus’ blessing on us
as we share in this meal together.

We remember, on the night of his betrayal, that Jesus took bread,
giving thanks, and broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take, eat. This is my body given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after supper, he also took the cup and said:
Drink from this all of you.
This is my blood shed for you and for the whole world
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

And now, O God, breathe your Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine,
that through them, we may receive and be nourished by the life of Christ.
Bless us all, O God,
as we offer our praise and our worship
in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

LAMB OF GOD

Jesus, Lamb of God,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world,

Grant us peace.

THE COMMUNION

Receive this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ,
and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We have been reminded of Jesus' sacrificial love for us
as we have shared this meal together
and through the power of the Holy Spirit,
we have received his life in us.

Gracious God,

we make our thanks visible by serving you and one another
all those for whom Christ died.

Send us in the power of your Spirit
to reveal your love in all we do and say.

We pray in the name of our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

The Sending Forth of the People of God
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HYMN: Brother, sister, let me serve you TIS 650

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven

we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

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BLESSING

Lord Jesus, as you walked on the road to Emmaus,
walk with us on the roads we travel.
Help us to know your presence with us,
and to be your presence to others.
And, at the end of the day, may we all enjoy your feast. Amen.

May the Lord bless you
and keep you
May His face shine upon you
and be gracious to you
May he lift up His countenance upon you
and give you peace. Amen.

SENDING SONG: May God's blessing be upon you now

May God's blessing be upon you now,
may you know of God's great love for you.
May God's blessing be upon you now,
right where you are.

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