

**KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
SUNDAY APRIL 30, 10.00 AM**

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, enter through the gate and find good pasture here:

Here we find restoration and renewal.

Come, follow the voice of the Shepherd and find life here:

Here we find abundant life in the promises of God.

Come, let us draw together and find teaching and fellowship here:

Here we find common ground, generosity and good will.

Come and worship:

With glad hearts we come to the green pasture, to the still waters, to the full table.

Eternal Friend who calls and guides us, help us to hear your voice in our fellowship today. Lead us to deeper understanding of the abundant life you promise, and to our participation in a world of love overflowing. Let goodness and mercy follow us, and let us dwell here and now with you. Amen.

LIGHT THE CANDLE God is here.....God is 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: In Christ Alone AT/615

In Christ alone my heart is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone – who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save.
Till on that cross, as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied;
For every sin on Him was laid,
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –

Bought with the precious blood of Christ.
No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gate of life, in these moments of stillness and silence, we reflect on the way we go through our days. There is wandering and aimlessness. There is worry and anxiety. There is enmity and hostility. There is a tendency to let the shadows prevail and the fear overtake us.

We confess that we can be led astray and forget the sound of your voice as it calls us to deeper truth.

God, we ask for your forgiveness, already granted, and we remember once again that your rod and staff, they comfort and guide. By asking for your forgiveness, already granted, we remember that we need not suffer unnecessarily, nor out of our needless suffering cause unnecessary suffering to others. Help us to live out the goodness and mercy that follow us, always.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Sisters and brothers, we have God's approval. Goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives, and we do dwell in the house of God.

God restores my soul. Thanks be to God. Amen

Guardian of our souls, we rejoice in the fellowship of this community, of those who follow your voice. We give thanks for what we share together, and how together in your name we share your love with the world. Thank you for enabling us to offer rest and refuge to those in need, encouragement to the fearful an example to the lost. We put our trust in you. Amen.

PEACE

SING: Jesus the Lord said: "I am the bread" TIS/239

Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the bread,
the bread of life for the world am I,
the bread of life for the world am I,
the bread of life for the world am I.'
Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the bread,
the bread of life for the world am I.'

Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the door,
the way and the door for the poor am I,
the way and the door for the poor am I,
the way and the door for the poor am I.
Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the door,
the way and the door for the poor am I.'

Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the light,
the one true light of the world am I,
the one true light of the world am I,
the one true light of the world am I.'
Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the light,
the one true light of the world am I.'

Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the shepherd,
the one good shepherd of the sheep am I,
the one good shepherd of the sheep am I,
the one good shepherd of the sheep am I.'
Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the shepherd,
the one good shepherd of the sheep am I.'

Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the life,
the resurrection and the life am I,
the resurrection and the life am I,
the resurrection and the life am I.'
Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the life,
the resurrection and the life am I.'

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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.

READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES:

Acts 2: 42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

John 10: 1-10

"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of

them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

REFLECTION: (from Moira Laidlaw)

Perhaps it is my Scottish background – but I feel that Psalm 23 is imprinted on my DNA. Growing up in Scotland as part of a regular churchgoing family – singing the psalm to the tune Crimond was a frequent event. I do not know what it was that attracted me to the psalm even at a young age - maybe that sense of peacefulness and presence of God that I still have when singing or reading this psalm. I don't think this is something peculiar just to me. The respected Old Testament scholar, Bernhard W. Anderson, writes "By virtue of its profound simplicity and matchless beauty this psalm has touched the hearts of countless people through the centuries. Here is a poem which children have learned by heart, which has sustained the mature in the perplexities of life, and which has been a peaceful benediction on the lips of the dying." ¹

And as the following opening verses of a meditation by Marjorie J. Thompson on Psalm 23 points out.²

"The Lord is my shepherd." Isn't it strange, Lord, how after all these years – long since Western civilisation abandoned a pastoral way of life, long since children ceased to know where the lamb on supermarket meat counters came from, long since any first-hand acquaintance with shepherds and sheep – the image of a shepherd still has such deep attraction, such power to comfort and console."

That power to comfort and console is probably why this is a psalm that many people choose to be read or sung when they need the reassurance of God's presence with them, especially when walking through deep and dark valleys. The psalmist puts into words his feelings about this God whose care extends through all of life's events, which leads to a serenity of spirit - peace of mind, and, in all dangers, strength. There is a deepening of an awareness that God has been directing his life along a path that leads to fulfilment.

Very early in my first ministry I was asked to visit an old man who had been a faithful member of the church for many, many years but due to ill health was now confined to a nursing home. I was a bit apprehensive about the meeting as this man had been a fiery politician in a previous State Parliament. I needn't have worried as we got on famously right from the start when we found that we spoke with the same Scottish accent! He was crippled with arthritis and he told me that he couldn't wait to die. He had been married for many years and his wife had died relatively recently. "You know what" he said "she's waiting for me in the next field." When I looked a little puzzled he went on to tell me that he recited the 23rd psalm every night before going to sleep, picturing himself in a beautifully grassed pasture with his wife waiting for him close by on the other side of a fence that separated them. He said all this with such a deep sense of confidence and peace that I knew that the words of the psalm were reality for him. I didn't speak to him again as he died a few days later, but at his Service of Thanksgiving I was able to speak of his trust in the Good Shepherd.

I was able to tell of his last words to me also, which were words of great good humour. He had taken my hand in his, and, kissing it, said that as he was turning 92 the next day, he had not believed that he would have any new experiences in his life, but this was the first time he'd kissed the minister's hand! I heard of his death with a smile on my lips, remembering what he had said, but, more importantly, seeing him and his wife walking through those green pastures, hand in hand, towards their Lord, the welcoming Good Shepherd.

As the character of God is imaged in the words of the 23rd psalm, so the character of the shepherd is shown in his priorities – care for the sheep come before care for his own life. A special relationship exists between the sheep and the shepherd because the shepherd knows the sheep and they know the shepherd and therefore trust him. The life of the flock is therefore determined by its relationship to the shepherd – in the trust they have for the shepherd to lead them - and in the willingness on the shepherd's part to die for the flock.

The psalmist remembers how often God had prepared a table for him and, acting as a loving Host, had honoured him! On further reflection, he realised that he had been a guest of God all his life, privileged to receive from God's hand blessings in abundance, meat and drink, and joy at many festivals. ³ The fact that he is able to enjoy God's hospitality proves to be itself a means of grace whereby the often bitter sorrows of life can be overcome. We probably don't think of Psalm 23 in relation to hospitality but that is what it is about - God's hospitality - caring, healing, and nourishing lives.

Theologian Henri Nouwen described hospitality as 'creating a space where strangers can become friends and where healing can occur.' ⁴

This is the message of today's gospel where Jesus speaks about being the gate for the sheep – providing a place of safety and security for the sheep. He goes on to say that he came that we may have life and have it abundantly. His abundant life in us. In other words, he is the gate of our hearts giving us a sense of enduring peace and security so that, no matter how many dark valleys we traverse in life, there is that core of certainty deep within us assuring us that we are known, loved and cared for.

Gate-keepers in churches are unfortunately often viewed negatively. They are too often seen as people who only let others in on their terms, rather than Jesus' terms. Our task is to be positive gate keepers – welcoming people and creating a hospitable place where strangers can become friends. That is surely what the Good Shepherd of the Psalm and the Gospel is calling us all to do – and with the abundant life of the risen Christ in us – how can we fail?

SING: Highways and Byways

Seasons 6-18

Refrain

*Go into the highways and byways,
far beyond the safe and secure.
Gather in the lost and the lonely,
listen to the cries of the poor.
Go up to the skyways and flyways,
paint a rainbow all across the sky.
Living out the love of Christ Jesus,
shining out God's glory in our lives.*

God, make us ready to listen,
ready to worship, ready to pray.
Make us a people of mission,
willing to hear your word and obey.
Help us to welcome the stranger,
reach out to others in need.
Make us a people of holy hospitality.

Refrain

God, make us ready to follow,
ready to go wherever you say.
Guide us through all our tomorrows,
meeting the needs of every day.
Help us encourage each other,
striving for unity,
building a rainbow of diff'rent personalities.

Refrain

God, make us ready to lead and
ready to shoulder some of the load.
Give us the courage we need and
faith to explore a different road.
Give us a spirit of service in our communities.
Teach us to labour in love,
and live responsibly.

Refrain

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OFFERING:

OFFERING PRAYER:

Jesus, Good Shepherd, we thank you for the ways in which you have enfolded us in your love and called us by name to follow you. May these gifts and our lives offered in your name, be used to enfold others in your love. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

Loving God, we come with open hearts and hands willing to do what we can in your kingdom. Today as we pray for our world and for ourselves, help us to see how we might bring our hearts and hands to be the change we wish to see.

We pray for the environment for places of drought and flood, fire and famine.

We pray for our world for people who are refugees or living in war torn countries.

We pray for Australia, this land we call home. We pray for our First Peoples; help us to work for reconciliation.

We pray for our government and all leaders that justice and charity would be part of our political discourse.

We pray for our neighbourhood for people struggling with anxiety and depression, for those who deliver and services through The Storehouse and other organisations. Help us to be not just people who live alongside one another, but community.

We pray for our church; you have gathered us here, help us to also go out and share the love we have known. We pray specially at this time, for Dr Deidre Palmer, President of the UCA Assembly. May you constantly walk by her side in the important task of guiding the Uniting Church.

May we be your hands and feet in the world. Give us hope, wisdom and strength. We pray in your name. Amen

SING: We are your people TIS/468

We are your people;
Spirit of grace,
you dare to make us
to all our neighbours,
Christ's living voice, hands and face.

Joined in community,
treasured and fed,
may we discover
gifts in each other,
willing to lead and be led.

Rich in diversity,
help us to live
closer than neighbours,
open to strangers,
able to clash and forgive.

Glad of tradition,
help us to see
in all life's changing,
where you are leading,
where our best efforts should be.

Give, as we venture
justice and care
(peaceful, resisting,
waiting or risking)
wisdom to know when and where.

Christ as we serve you
in different ways,
may all we're doing
show that you're living,
meeting your love with our praise.

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BLESSING:

Go out and listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd. Know that when he calls, you will recognise him; for Christ always call us to the place of love, to the place of hope, even in the midst of darkness.

Go in God's grace and with God's blessing. In the name of the one who calls us. Amen.

SENDING SONG: Ev'ryday Loving

Seasons 5-16

This welcome here is simply free.
It's for the world, for you and me.
We bring our smiles and cares,
our heart's own prayers
and the stories of our days,
to worship God in many ways.
And together we're...

Chorus:

Ev'ryday loving!
Ev'ryday loving!
We're just ev'ryday loving!
The way that God loves us!

God's love is deep. God's love is wide.
It's all around, and here inside.
So when we lend a hand or take a stand,
it's love we're sending round.
In ev'ry day, that's where it's found.
And together we're...

Chorus:

Ev'ryday loving!
Ev'ryday loving!
We're just ev'ryday loving!
The way that God loves us!

Then can we dare to use our eyes,
and tune our ears to others' cries?
To hear the silent words of those unheard,
and sing with them their song.
We know that God will lead us on.
And together we're...

Chorus:

Ev'ryday loving!
Ev'ryday loving!
We're just ev'ryday loving!
The way that God loves us!

O God of Earth, you hear us call.
Shower your love upon us all.
And like a mustard seed, the faith we need
will blossom as we grow.
Give us your faith, to live and show,
that what you're giving is...

Chorus:

Ev'ryday loving!
Ev'ryday loving!
We're just ev'ryday loving!
The way that God loves us!