

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
May 7th 2023
EMBOLDENED TO PROCLAIM

The Gathering of the People of God

WELCOME & GREETING

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the elders past present and emerging of the Biddegai and Gweagal people of the Eora Nation who have cared for this land from time immemorial, recognising that this land on which we live and move was and always will be, Aboriginal Land.

KUC MISSION STATEMENT

We welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles,
We create a safe place for the community
We share the journey of life and faith.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Like the multi-hued pebbles gathered onto a beach,
we come from many places.

Like river stones, smooth from life's surges or chipped in
the world's torrents,
so we come worn and wounded.

Like precious stones, chosen, crafted and valued,
so we come, cared about and loved by God.

Like the stones of a building,
so God brings us together.

Come, as living stones, into God's presence!
We come to worship God.

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here

God is always here

God is with us

God is always with us

SING: We are marching in the light of God TIS 666

**We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.**

**We are marching, marching
We are marching, Oh---
We are marching in the light of God
We are marching, marching
We are marching, Oh---
We are marching in the light of God.**

**We are living in the light of God
We are living in the light of God
We are living in the light of God
We are living in the light of God**

**We are living, living
We are living, Oh---
We are living in the light of God
We are living, living
We are living, Oh---
We are living in the light of God.**

**We are living in the love of God
We are living in the love of God
We are living in the love of God
We are living in the love of God**

**We are living, living
We are living, Oh---
We are living in the love of God
We are living, living
We are living, Oh---
We are living in the love of God.**

**We are moving in the power of God
We are moving in the power of God
We are moving in the power of God
We are moving in the power of God**

**We are moving, moving
We are moving, Oh---
We are moving in the power of God
We are moving, moving**

We are moving, Oh---
We are moving in the power of God.

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OPENING PRAYER

Creator, you have shaped a place for us made of love and held in grace.
It is filled with the whispers of the ancients who followed you and sculpted our faith.

Breathe into this place again, that we may know your way, your truth, and your life. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION & DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Incline your ear to us, O God, for we have so much to say.

There is so much that causes us to stumble and fall.

So much alters our path and causes us to question your goodness.

So much hurt and pain.

So much to lament.

We are listening for you, O God, longing to hear your still small voice in pebbles and stones, rocks and boulders, and even in the living stones, you imagine each of us to be. Our ears are open to you, O God.

Silence.

Words of affirmation

Worn and scattered or hard or broken, we are precious.

We have received mercy and are God's people.

Alleluia! We are God's people and proclaim God's goodness. Amen.

PEACE

May the peace of God be with you. **And also with you.**

SING: Companions on the journey Seasons 8-8

**We are companions on the journey,
breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God.**

**No longer strangers to each other,
no longer strangers in God's house;
we are fed and we are nourished
by the strength of those who care,
by the strength of those who care.**

**We are companions on the journey,
breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God.**

**We have been gifted with each other,
and we are called by the Word of the Lord:
to act with justice, to love tenderly,
and to walk humbly with our God,
to walk humbly with our God.**

**We are companions on the journey,
breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God.**

**We are companions on the journey,
breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God.**

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS:

ACTS 7 55-60

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

JOHN 14 1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

SING: Kum baYah (Choir)

**Kumbayah my Lord, kumbayah
Kumbayah my Lord, kumbayah
Kumbayah my Lord, kumbayah
Oh Lord, kumbayah**

**Someone's crying, my Lord, kumbaya
Someone's crying, my Lord, kumbaya
Someone's crying, my Lord, kumbaya
Oh Lord, kumbaya**

**Someone's singing, my Lord, kumbaya
Someone's singing, my Lord, kumbaya
Someone's singing, my Lord, kumbaya
Oh Lord, kumbaya**

**Someone's praying, my Lord, kumbaya
Someone's praying, my Lord, kumbaya
Someone's pray, my Lord, kumbaya
Oh Lord, kumbaya**

REFLECTION – Deok Hee

“Emboldened to Proclaim”

Acts 7:55–60, John 14:1–14

If you meet someone for the first time, what questions would you ask them? You're probably asking, “What's your name?” “What do you do?” “Where do you live?” etc.. We had community lunch last Friday. I joined a lady at the table, and when she saw me she asked, “What's your name?” I said Deok Hee. She asked me again how to pronounce my name. I wanted her to remember my name, so I explained her how to easily remember my name. I said my name sounds like “Donkey” “Door Key”, and she called me Door Key. I don't mind. I asked back to her, “What's your name?” “Where do you live?” “Where are you from?” “How many children do you have?”. You know we soon became friends. We ask those questions when we meet someone for the first time.

I would like to ask a question to you. When you heard about Jesus for the first time, what did you ask or what did you want to know about him? When I was a child, a primary school kid, I often asked my Sunday school teachers about God. “Who is God? Is he alive? Then where is he now? Is he in the sky? Have you seen him before? I want to see him.. I really want to see him.” These questions are exactly what my children have asked me many times. How about you? Have you asked these questions too? Knowing and understanding is very important in our Christian life, especially who Jesus is. Without understanding about Jesus, we can't truly follow him.

Jesus is telling us who he is in our John's gospel reading chapter 14. “I am the way, the truth, and the life”. There is also a song about this chapter John 14. This song was one of my favourite songs when I was a kid. “I am the way, the truth, and the life, that's what Jesus said. Without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no

knowing; without the life, there is no living. I am the way, the truth, and the life, that's what Jesus said." This passage from chapter 14 of John is part of a great talk that Jesus spoke to the disciples in the upper room. The end of his earthly ministry approaching, the cross looming before him, Jesus gathered his disciples around him and to help them understand his life and work, his approaching death and resurrection, he spoke to them these words, which include him saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Let's together think about this this morning what it means to us living this world. Jesus begins by saying, "I am the way." When God created us, he didn't put us permanently in a set of rotating doors, like those that go around and around in the front of big buildings. Even though life may at times seem to be just going in circles, even though there are those who say that life is one cycle after another and that everything that comes around goes around, and even though there are theories about life that say that life is one reincarnation after another, Jesus does not say that. God has created us with a purpose. Life has a goal to it. We are created to travel through life toward an end. And today Jesus says the way to that end is through him. The safest, most secure, most dependable way through life is by Christ. That's why Jesus says, "I am the way."

A missionary told a story of being lost in an African jungle, and finally he came across a small village. He found a lady who could speak English, and volunteered to take him back to the missionaries' place. As they hacked their way through the jungle, the missionary asked, "Are you sure this is the right way home?" The lady said, "Sir, in this jungle there is no pathway, I am the path . . . you must follow." If we want to find our way to the place God has created for us, we must follow Christ. Because Jesus leads us to God. Because he is the way.

Now, we are not only travellers through life, we are also called to be learners, and for that reason, Jesus went on to say, "I am the truth." We are created for the truth, and seeking and living the truth is what we are called to do. However, when you think about it, it is rather ironic. While more books have been written about Jesus than about any other person who ever lived, Jesus never wrote a book. He didn't sit down and write about the truth or anything like that. In fact, there is only one instance in the gospels (in John 8), when Jesus wrote anything and that was in the dust at his feet and we have no record of what he wrote. But that's okay. Because instead of writing about the truth, Jesus lived it. His life was a witness to the truth. And the truth of his life is seen through the eyes of the blind man who now sees. The truth of his life is seen in the leper who returned to give thanks, the dancing feet of the lame made well, and the dead now raised to life. Because Jesus is truth in the flesh - truth incarnate - truth able to say, "If anyone sees me, they see the Father."

When we look at Jesus, we see the truth about God. We learn that, first and foremost, God is love. It is God's nature to love. It is God's nature to show mercy. It is God's nature to forgive and accept the outcast, welcome home the prodigal. In Christ, we see the very nature of God whose love for us is unwarranted, and most unexpected. And when we look at Jesus, we learn the truth about the life God wants us to live. We, too, are to love, to forgive, to show mercy, and welcome each other, and in doing so, be part of the truth about God. The New Testament puts it another way in 1 John 4:7, when John writes, "Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." He also says, "If anyone says, I love God, and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother or sister, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." When we look at Jesus, we also see the truth about ourselves. Maybe that's why it's so hard to look at Jesus sometimes, because when we look at Jesus, we see ourselves - the ugliness of our lives, the sinfulness of our thoughts and deeds, our selfishness and pride, and our failure to love. When Jesus says, "I am the truth," he confronts us with our failures to forgive, our refusals to show mercy, and our self-righteousness pride that puts others down. That is why it is so important that Jesus not only say, "I am the way and the truth" but also say, "I am the life." It is because without Jesus, there is no life in us. Jesus says, "I am the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." These words are Jesus' invitation to us to come to him, to receive in him the gift of life that God created for us.

In Acts 7, we have the story of Stephen. We are first introduced to Stephen in Acts 6. The disciples were preaching with such strength that their numbers were increasing daily, but those in Greek society were concerned because the widows were being neglected. So, the disciples selected seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and wisdom, and appointed them to the task of caring for the widows. Stephen was among the seven appointed to this task. No sooner was Stephen appointed to this ministry than he was arrested. Stephen proclaimed God to the religious authorities. They didn't like the message and got angry and arrested him. They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him and he died.

I guess he was a good man, a good neighbor, a good friend, a hard worker, always ready to help. He was an ordinary man like us. Maybe a good husband... we don't know if he was married or not. But this good man was not afraid of death but preached the word of God, and was stoned and died. I asked to myself why, why he did that. He knew danger there. What made him boldly preach the word of God without fear of death? He followed Jesus, experienced Jesus, learned Jesus, and he knew and realized that Jesus was the way and the truth and the life.

"I am the way and the truth and the life." Throughout John's gospel this has been the theme. In Jesus, we have life. In fact, in the very beginning of his gospel that's what John tells us, he writes, "In the beginning was the Word ... and in him was life and the life was the light of men." And again at the end of his gospel, John says that same thing. "These things are written that you may have life in his name." That is God's promise to us. In Jesus, we have the way and the truth and the life that God creates us to be. In Jesus, we find the blessing that God has ready for us. In Jesus, we find the power for living and the essence of life itself. That's why he tells us, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Brothers and sisters in Christ! Please remember this! If you want to find the way to the place God has created for us, you must follow Christ because Jesus leads us to God, because he is the way. If you want to experience life both now and in eternity you must follow his teachings because Jesus is the truth. If you want to grow and receive the gift of life that God created for us, you must accept Jesus' invitation to us to come to him because Jesus is the life. These are the things we should boldly share with our neighbours.

Amen.

SING: God gives us a future TiS 687

**God gives us a future,
daring us to go
into dreams and dangers
on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow
in the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us,
for new life starts now.**

**We must leave behind us
sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning
is a better way.
Fear and doubt and habit
must not hold us back:
God gives hope, and insight,
and the strength we lack.**

**Holy Spirit, teach us
how to read the signs,
how to meet the challenge
of our troubled times.
Love us into action,**

**stir us into prayer,
till we choose God's life, and
find our future there.**

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OFFERING

Gracious and loving God, accept and bless these gifts and all that we do in the name of Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. May our lives impart the truth of the gospel and our witness point others to Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS & THE LORD'S PRAYER

God, we come before you in a spirit of prayer,
knowing that our world is hurting.
We know you have great compassion for all your people,
and that we are dear to you.
We know you have created a safe place, a refuge,
for those who need it.
Guide them to it, we pray.

There is a place for those who mourn and for those who hurt,
a place of comfort and a place of healing:
for those we have lost to illness,
and those we have never known.
In silence, we pray...
Hear us.

There is a place for those who hunger and thirst,
a place of banquets and grace:
for farmers trapped in unfair trade,
families dispossessed.
In silence, we pray...
Hear us.

There is a place for those imprisoned for belief and justice,
a place of freedom and full lives:
for mothers of the disappeared,
fathers exiled.
In silence, we pray...
Hear us.

There is a place for those oppressed and downtrodden,
a place of liberation and justice:
for children of sectarianism,
families divided.
In silence, we pray...
Hear us.

Hear all our prayers, loving God,
and answer according to your will and purpose.
We pray in Christ's name. **Amen.**

The Sending Forth of the People of God

SING: Deep stillness ATW 494

**For you, deep stillness of the silent inland;
for you, deep blue of the desert skies;**

**for you, flame red of the rocks and stones;
for you, sweet water from hidden springs.**

**From the edges, seek the heartlands,
and when you're burnt by the journey**

**may the cool winds of the hovering Spirit
soothe and replenish you.**

**In the name of Christ,
In the name of Christ.**

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BLESSING

You are listening, with God, to the hurts and pains of this world.
You are paying attention to where love is needed.
Take these stones to remember that you are alive in God's love and called to offer mercy and grace.

God sends you out to proclaim mighty acts with awe-inspiring light.
Go, as Easter people, living stones, called and chosen, forgiven and formed into a new community, working together to show God's mercy and truth.

We go to live in God's way in the name of Christ and the power of the Spirit. Amen.

SENDING SONG: The Anointing Seasons 9-32

**Lead us to listen, to hear the heart speak.
O God in the quiet voice, draw us to you.
Awaken our wisdom, enlighten our vision.
Anoint us to heal and to love as you do.**

**Give us faith that is strong,
give us hope that is bright.
May the small voice be our concern,
may we make burdens light.**

**Lead us to listen, to hear the heart speak.
O God in the quiet voice, draw us to you.
Awaken our wisdom, enlighten our vision.
Anoint us to heal and to love as you do.**

**May we be slow to judge,
may we learn to forgive.
Through compassion and kindness,
may we let others live.**

**Lead us to listen, to hear the heart speak.
O God in the quiet voice, draw us to you.
Awaken our wisdom, enlighten our vision.
Anoint us to heal and to love as you do.**