

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

November 12, 2023

24th Sunday after Pentecost

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.

KUC VISION STATEMENTS

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

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here / ***God is always here***
God is with us / ***God is always with us***

CALL TO WORSHIP

Give ear, O people, to God's teachings.
For in parable and story God's wisdom is revealed.

Let us listen for things we have heard and known,
for the stories that are so important
that we keep telling them over and over again.

Let us remember God's glorious works in our own words.

People of God, be a witness and a light.

Share what you know and trust in the goodness of God.

Together, let us raise our hope
and remember every opening and possibility.
Let us worship God in wonder and truth.

OPENING PRAYER

We come with our whole hearts ready and waiting to share
in your graceful abundance.

Come, O God, open to us.

We come uncertain and indecisive.

Come, O God, open to us.

We come hopeful and curious.

Come, O God, open to us.

We come expectant and eager.

Come, O God, open to us.

Open all the doors and welcome us in.

Invite us to share in your story, O God,

where there is more than enough love and even more grace.

Come, O God, open to us.

HYMN: Praise to the living God TIS 102

Praise to the living God,
all praise be to his name,
who was, and is, and is to be,
and still the same:
the one eternal God
before what now appears,
the First, the Last, beyond all thought
his timeless years!

Formless, all lovely forms
declare his loveliness;
holy, no holiness of earth
can his express.
Behold the Lord of all:
creation speaks his praise,
and everywhere, above, below,
his will obeys.

God's Spirit freely flows,
high surging where it will:
in prophet's word he spoke of old,

is speaking still.

Established is God's law
and changeless it shall stand,
deep written on the human heart,
on sea, on land.

God has eternal life
implanted in the soul;
his love shall be our strength and stay
while ages roll.

Praise to the living God,
all praise be to his name,
who was, and is, and is to be,
and still the same!

From the Jewish Yigdal c. 13th cent.

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of Resurrection and New Life, forgive us when we focus too much on the things of this world instead of the lives in this world.

Forgive us when we put all of our hope in life after death and ignore our opportunity to be living hope in the world now.

Forgive us when we water down our faith to a belief in afterlife, rather than a call for justice and reconciliation in our lives now.

Forgive us, most of all, for mistaking Your promise of eternity with just a place we go after we die.

Help us to remember that eternal life, new life, begins now, and that we have participated in your death and resurrection, and are called to live in your ways of justice, peace, and love.

Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

In Christ we have the promise of new life now.

In Christ we have the resurrection.

In Christ we have eternity.

In Christ we have the opportunity, time and time again,
to seek forgiveness, to be reconciled, to show mercy, and to love unconditionally.

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: As the deer pants TIS 703 or P&W 445

As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

I want you more than gold or silver,
only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
and the apple of my eye.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

You're my friend and you are my brother
even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other,
so much more than anything.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your

ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

“Now, therefore, revere the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went and among all the peoples through whom we passed, and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.” But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!” Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” The people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.” So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

Matthew 25:1–13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. Later the other young women came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

REFLECTION

How many of you have ever run out of gas? It would appear that every year in Australia at least more than 5000 people call for help because they have run out of gas. Besides flat

tires, dead batteries, and misplaced keys, running out of gas ranks right up there in the reasons why people call for roadside service. One might understand this happening a generation ago, when gas gauges were not entirely accurate, and when all the warning lights of our day were non-existent. But now we have warning messages that our fuel is running low, and then additional progressively urgent warnings indicating just how many estimated kilometres of driving we have left. One must say that most people who run out of fuel are “without excuse.” Why, then, do we do it, seemingly as often today as people did years ago, when all of the advantages of technology were not available? Why? You will find answers to this question at the end of our message.

Do you remember some of your favourite childhood games? One of my favourite games was “hide-and-seek”. This game involved someone being “it”. They had to count to give everyone a chance to find a safe place. They count one to ten and the time ended with the phrase, “Ready or not, here I come!” The time was up. There was no more opportunity to hide or find a safe place. Such will be the case with the Last Day. The time will come when the Lord Jesus returns as the Judge. Ready or not, here Christ comes! Of course, this is not a game but the reality and truth of God’s word. Many people in our world today are expecting the second coming of Jesus. The Bible definitely says that Jesus is coming again one day, and it says, in verse 13 in our reading, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” The Lord wants us to be ready and be prepared. The apostles and the whole early church also expected Christ to return soon. They anticipated the appearance of Jesus, like we anticipate the appearance of the bridegroom whenever we gather for a wedding. Christ's return was not perceived as something that might happen; it was a certainty that was expected to occur at any time, any day, any hour. Early Christians prepared for the second coming of Christ, and they waited with excitement. They experienced a sense of urgency as they waited to see Jesus again. But now, many years have passed. In fact, nearly 2,000 years have gone by, and still, Jesus has not returned. Many Christians have lost the sense of urgency. That urgency turned into disappointment, which gave way to doubt, which finally gave way to indifference. The second coming of Christ seems to be taking so long that many of us rarely even think about it anymore. How often do you think about the end of this world? Do you ever imagine what it will be like? Do you look forward to it? Or are you afraid? Do you even care whether or not it comes in your lifetime?

Our gospel lesson for this morning is clear about what our attitude should be toward Jesus' second coming. “Watch,” Jesus says. “Be ready.” Jesus warns us that we must be prepared for the day he comes again. The pictures Jesus uses to describe our need to be ready are graphic and memorable. He reminds us about what happened to the people of Noah's day who were unconcerned. He paints an image of two farmers in the field; one is taken and the other is left. Two women are grinding at the mill; one is taken and the other is left. Jesus tells a story about ten maidens who were called to keep their lamps burning until the bridegroom arrived; yet only five brought enough oil to last. The other five missed the wedding. All these pictures scream out to us: Be ready! Watch! Be wise!

We might illustrate the need for readiness in a different way. Firemen are trained and equipped to fight fires. They know there will be fires, but they don't know when. And so they are in a constant state of readiness, even when they sleep. Their clothing is all laid out so they can quickly dress and get to the fire. Sometimes I see the fire truck outside the grocery store where I shop. The firemen are in the store, buying food. But they also have their portable radios in hand, ready to rush out if word of a fire is received. We, too, must be ready, Jesus tells us. Then our question this morning is "how should we prepare ourselves?" The idea of "being prepared" seems to surface from time to time in our daily lives. When a health or financial crisis comes our way, we wonder if we have enough insurance and resources to carry us. We stop and ask ourselves, "Am I prepared?" Some of us take the idea of preparedness very seriously, while others seem to get along fine with less preparation. You may remember the story of the ant that spent the summer preparing for the winter by storing up food. The grasshopper, however, used the summertime to play his fiddle and dance the days away. The grasshopper came to an unhappy end, while the ant enjoyed the winter, happy and warm.

After we have met God and accepted new life, God's grace begins to prepare us for holy living and the ministry of witnessing to others. Once we have a transforming story, we are mandated by Jesus to tell the story. Scripture tells us that we must always be ready to tell others the good news. Paul says in 2 Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction." I was a youth and young adult group worker when I was in Korea many years ago. One day one of the youth members who was Year 11 high school student came to me and wanted to share his story. He said his parents had passed away few years ago because of the car accident and he was living with his grandparents. He wondered if God was the really living and loving God. He asked me why his life was so miserable if God really loved him. He said he had no meaning or purpose in life as to why he should live. As I listened to his story, I asked God for help. "God, help. How can I help this friend?" God said, "Share, share with him your life, your experiences, and the wonderful things I have done for you." I shared my life with him. I shared how I met God. I shared what God had done and how he had led me in every difficult moment in my life. I shared with him why God is the real living and loving God. I shared how God changed my life. And together we prayed with tears of gratitude. He later became a church minister and now sharing God he has met and experienced with many people in Korea.

I once read a story about a teenager named Trevor. One night on the evening news, Trevor saw pictures of the homeless people living in his own city. As he watched, he was reminded of how cold it was outside in the winter, even to walk a few blocks to school. At that moment, a dream began to unfold in his mind. Trevor wanted to go himself to the streets downtown, and give a blanket to someone who was cold. After that experience, Trevor's dream grew. With encouragement and help from his parents, his friends, and other concerned people, he began a food kitchen called, "Trevor's Place," that continues to bring warmth and food to the homeless in his city. Trevor's Place is one of the lighted

lamps shining brightly in preparation for the arrival of the bridegroom.

As we wait for the return of Christ, God cries out for justice to be done. Be ready, by loving your neighbour and by allowing your love to turn into acts of justice. As we light our lamps, as we care for each other while we wait, an amazing thing happens. The actions of God's people become the actions of Christ. When you do something to help those in need, when you act to turn your own dreams of justice into reality, or when you encourage someone else in their dreams, Christ is there. Jesus comes! And as we wait for the second coming of Christ, a new world emerges right in our own congregation, right in our own community. As we wait, we begin to realize that Christ has come, and continues to come to us every day. He is not yet here in all his fullness, but Jesus is, in fact, here, helping us to dream, to wait, to prepare, to work for justice.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this morning I would like to ask you a question. Are you ready? When we meet someone, who needs to hear our story and the "Jesus' story," are we prepared to tell it? Do we have a personal story? Do we do something to help those in need? Do we care them? Be ready! Do acts of justice! The bridegroom, in all his glory, is on his way! Let us make sure we are prepared not only to meet Jesus one day face to face, but that we are ready to meet Jesus in the faces of those in our path each day. Amen.

HYMN I am the light of the world All together 128

(Refrain)

I am the light of the world!

You people come and follow me!

*If you follow and love, you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.*

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and the shepherds have found their way home,
the work of Christmas is begun!

(Refrain)

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and the shepherds have found their way home,
the work of Christmas is begun!

(Refrain)

To find the lost and lonely one,
to heal that broken soul with love,
to feed the hungry children with warmth and good food,
to feel the earth below the sky above!

(Refrain)

To free the prisoner from his chains,
to make the powerful care,
to rebuild the nations with strength and goodwill,
to call a man your brother everywhere.

(Refrain)

To bring hope to every task you do,
to dance at a baby's new birth,
to make music in an old man's heart,
and sing to the colours of the earth!

(Refrain)

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

With these gifts, O God,
we commit ourselves again to tending the light of Christ
and opening every door to welcome love.
Fill us, and these gifts, with your grace and wisdom. 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. Amen.

(Silence)

God's promise of freedom, forgiveness, inclusion,
justice and peace are fulfilled in Jesus.

He is the life-giving light which even the deepest darkness cannot extinguish.

It is through Jesus that we are able to come close to God

and discern God's plans of hope for us. ***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

Let us draw near to the holy table.

This is the table our Lord has prepared
for those who love him.

Jesus said, "Come to me,

all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.

COMMUNION HYMN:

Come to the banquet All together 475 (Verses 1, 5, 6, and 7)

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Though you maybe have no money,
though you maybe feel unworthy,
in your strength or in your weakness
you are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Whether you've been lost or faithful,
whether you've been wise or wasteful,
here's a place of rest and grace,
and you are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Here is one who runs to meet you,
loving arms stretched out to greet you.
Do not let your fear defeat you.
You are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Willing hands have made this bread
with yeast and salt and labour shared.
Let all the hungry ones be fed.
It's time for feasting, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

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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.

Gratitude, praise, hearts lifted high, voices full and joyful...
these you deserve loving God.
For when we were nothing,
you made us something.
When we had no name and no faith and no future,
you called us your children,
and gave us the example of saints.
When we lost our way or turned away,
you did not abandon us.
When we came back to you,
your arms opened wide in welcome.
So now in gratitude, we join our voices
to those of the Church on earth and in heaven:

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.***

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

You are holy, O God,
and blessed is Jesus Christ your Son
whom you sent to save us.
He came with healing in his touch,
and was wounded and rejected.
He came with mercy in his voice
and was mocked and despised.
He came with peace in his heart,
and met with violence and death.

But by your power O God,
he broke free from the prison of death.
The one who was dead now lives.
The one who humbled himself
is raised to rule over all creation.
The one who was alone and abandoned,
is with us always as he promised.

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.”

Lord, as we come to share the richness of your table
we cannot forget the rawness of the earth.

(Silence)

We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.

Lord, put our prosperity at the service of the poor.

(Silence)

We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty.

Lord, put our fullness at the service of the empty. silence

(Silence)

We cannot hear your words of peace
and forget the world at war and conflict.

***Show us quickly how to turn weapons into welcome signs
and the lust for power into a desire for peace.***

(Silence)

We cannot celebrate the feast of your family
and forget our divisions.

Lord, heal your Church in every brokenness. silence

(Silence)

So as we do in this place
what you did in an upstairs room,
send down your Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine
that they may become for us your body –
healing, forgiving and making us whole –
and that we may become for you,

your body, loving and caring in the world
until your kingdom comes. 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.

DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Eternal God,

you have graciously accepted us

as living members of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ,

and you have fed us with spiritual food

in the sacrament of his body and blood.

Send us now into the world in peace,

and grant us strength and courage

to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart,

through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Sending Forth of the People of God
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HYMN: 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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BLESSING

Go in peace, love and care for one another in the name of Christ.

May God go with you by day, go with you by night,
be with you in light, be with you in shadow,
strengthen you in work, strengthen you in sleep,
the great God encircle your thought and your prayer.

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: Behold, Behold Seasons 6-10

Behold (behold), behold (behold),
I make all things new,
beginning with you and starting from today.
Behold (behold), behold (behold),
I make all things new,
my promise is true, for I am Christ the way.

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