

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

25 February 2024

Lent 2

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 Biddegal 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

Let us say together who we are.

***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

I will tell of your name among the gathered community.

We worship you, O God.

I will praise you among the congregation.

We worship you, O God.

We bring our songs, we bring our lives.

Let us worship God.

HYMN: Love Divine TiS 217 (i)

Love Divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave:
thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be,
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

PD ; words: Charles Wesley

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OPENING PRAYER

There is a tradition in the Church that through Lent we journey with Jesus towards Jerusalem, following his footsteps towards the cross. We extinguish a candle each week to remind us that Jesus walks on towards his death. We pray that we might take up Christ's courage to walk with love and seek justice. And we pray that we might not falter in this task.

Extinguish one Lenten candle.

SING: God to enfold you (John Bell – Iona)

God to enfold you,
Christ to uphold you,
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight.
So may God grace you,
heal and embrace you,
lead you through darkness into the light.

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Loving God,
as we continue our journey through this season of Lent
we are reminded of your steadfast love.
A love which would endure forever
through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.
A love given not to judge but to save,
causing human sinfulness to be encountered by divine compassion.

So we praise you, our God,
who does not trade love for love but gives love without price,
who does not return evil for evil but renders good for evil,
who does not crucify sinners but dies in their place.

We shall forever give thanks for your love and grace.
To you be praise and glory, O God.
In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We know that nothing is able to separate us
from the love of God in Jesus Christ.
Let us in freedom confess the wrong we have done.

Christ calls us to follow.

Sometimes, we are afraid.

Christ calls us to love the world.

Sometimes, we are afraid.

Christ calls us to work for justice.

Sometimes, we are afraid.

We remember to you, Ancient of Days,
the times and places where we have not responded
to your call to love our neighbours and to work for justice.

In remembering with honesty, we pray
that you might grant us the courage to follow Christ
in the moments, the days, and the weeks ahead. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Brothers, sisters, siblings in Christ, scripture reminds us of how wide and vast
and deep and enduring is the grace of God, how slow to anger and how full of
steadfast love.

Hear then this Good News:
In Christ, your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

HYMN: The Lord of the dance TiS 242

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,
at Bethlehem I had my birth:

(Refrain)

*Dance then, wherever you may be;
"I am the Lord of the dance," said he;
"and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance," said he.*

I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,
but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John,
they came with me and the dance went on:

(Refrain)

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:
the holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,
and they left me there on a cross to die:

(Refrain)

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;
but I am the dance and I still go on:
(Refrain)

They cut me down and I leap up high,
I am the life that will never, never die;
I'll live in you if you'll live in me:
"I am the Lord of the Dance," said he:
(Refrain)

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Genesis 17:1-7;15-16

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

15 God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Mark 8:31-38

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

34 He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

REFLECTION

Well, here we are on the second Sunday of Lent. It is the time of year when we are called to reflect, repent and renew. I encourage you to continually remember Jesus' journey to Calvary to the cross and I hope you be a true disciple of Christ and experience God's amazing love as you journey together with Christ in this Lenten season.

Have you ever said something really dumb? Or said something that came out all wrong? I remember one Sunday morning in my previous placement that I made everybody laugh when I said the opening words to my prayer. As we got ready for the morning pray, what I meant to say was, "Let us bow our heads in and pray silently while the organ plays." But what I actually said was, I said, "Let us bow our heads in a moment of prayer, while the organ plays silently...." The organist sat there with her fingers frozen in midair over the keyboard and a puzzled look on her face which clearly said, "How do I play silently." This is what Peter did in our Gospel story this morning.

"Who do people say that I am?" Jesus asked his disciples one day. The disciples answered that some people thought he was John the Baptizer or Elijah or one of the prophets. "Enough of what other people think," Jesus said. "What about you? Who do you say that I am?" This time Peter answered. "You are the Christ". Christ was the Greek word for Messiah. Peter thought that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Jesus praised Simon, "You are so great..." After that Jesus told the disciples that he was going to have to suffer and be put to death. Peter couldn't stand that idea and told him, "This shall never happen to you". Jesus recognized the same temptation coming to him as he had heard in the wilderness. The temptation to not complete his mission. He told Peter, "Go away from me Satan, you don't care about the things of God, you are only seeing things in human terms." At this point Jesus spoke to the large crowd and also to the individual. They all had the same opportunity to hear and to respond. He said to all of them--his closest disciples and to the crowd on the fringe. If anyone would come after me he must do three things: 1. deny himself. 2. take up his cross. 3. follow me.

Our Lenten journey is a journey with Jesus as we follow Jesus. So this morning we will think about these three things, what it means to us today, denying oneself, taking up the cross, and following Jesus Christ. Denying oneself means more than giving up something for Lent. Some people will say, "I am giving up chocolate candy for Lent or I am giving up coffee or I am giving up computer game. Although you could deny yourself something such as this, Jesus was talking about something different from that. He was talking about the process of becoming his true disciple. If anyone wants to be my disciple then he has to be different from what he is now. The people in the crowds had no real commitment to him--his disciples were on the way but even Peter had a lack of understanding. What does the word "deny" mean anyway? The Greek word used here is a strong word. It is the same used for when Peter denied Jesus in the courtyard--it means to state that you have no connection with something--to state that you are not connected in any way to whatever is in view. Deny here is not the same as what we usually mean by self denial when we are giving up something. What Jesus was saying is that God is to be at the centre of life; The whole world is designed to function with God at its centre, so when you put yourself or anyone or anything else there, it all goes wrong. That's what Jesus was getting at when he said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God (that is, the God centred life – seek that first) then everything else that you need will be yours as well." That's what Jesus did. The Kingdom was first in his life. God was at the centre of his life. So, if we want to follow him, to be his disciples, we must deny ourselves first place, and allow God to have first place. And when we do, then everything will fit together and life will be what it is intended to be.

How about Taking Up His Cross? What does taking up the cross mean? Some people think they are taking up the cross when they are suffering with sickness and disease. Others think it is suffering some trial or hardship. Some of you might say, "What is my cross?" Remember the story of Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus did not want to die. He could see the cross looming before him, and he did not want to die – not then, so early in his life – and not like that – so painful, so lonely, so rejected. The struggle was so intense that sweat appeared on his brow like great drops of blood. But finally, he received the grace necessary to pray the greatest prayer that can be prayed. He prayed, "Not my will, but your will be done." So, the cross we are called to bear is the same as the cross Jesus was called to bear. The cross is the cross of obedience. That's difficult. Again and again, I have had people tell me that the single most difficult thing about being a disciple is giving up control. We want to decide what commandments we will obey and which we will not. We want to decide whom we will love and under what circumstances we will serve. To give up control is not easy. But when we come to know that God is like Jesus, that he really loves us and cares about us, then we can trust that he knows what is best for us and that he wants what is best for us. Once we know that, really know that, then we can pray, "Not my will, but your will be done." Jesus says, "Take up your cross - the cross of obedience."

Then, Jesus says, "Come, follow me." What does it mean by that? Jesus called his first century disciples and he calls us, saying, "Come, follow me." The question of all questions is, "Does he know where he is going? Is that where I want to go, too?" That's important because who you follow not only determines where you go, it also profoundly shapes what you experience and who you become along the way. Jesus' first century disciples lived with Jesus, listened to Jesus, learned from Jesus. And, day by day, something of Jesus' spirit began to be imprinted upon them. They began to see with the eyes of Jesus. They began to feel and care with the heart of Jesus. They began to reach out compassionately with the hands of Jesus. Over time, they began to look and sound like Jesus. And, they turned the world upside down. Of course, it's not always easy. Following Jesus does lead to a cross, you know. But, Jesus never said it was easy. Remember the man who said to Jesus, "Lord, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus cautioned him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds have their nests, but I don't even have a place to lay my head." He did not say it would be easy. But he did promise to be with us. He did promise to give us everything we need for the journey. And he promised that following him will lead to abundant life, eternal life. To follow Jesus means that, over time, by keeping company with him, by opening ourselves to him, we begin to look and sound like him. And when we do, we become "the body of Christ," we become the best we will ever be, and life becomes the best it can be.

Friends in Christ. We marked with ashes in the sign of the cross on Ash Wednesday and we prayed that we would remember Jesus and follow him. To follow Jesus - to live a life that looks and sounds like Jesus - it's not easy. But it's the hope of the world. And it's the best hope of your life and my life. "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." That's what he said to his disciples 2000 years ago and that is what he says to all of us here this morning as we walk together Lent toward the cross. Amen.

HYMN The Servant King TiS 256

From heaven you came helpless babe,
entered our world your glory veiled;
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

(Refrain)

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears,
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
“Yet not my will, but yours,” he said.

(Refrain)

Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

(Refrain)

So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him;
each other’s needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we’re serving.

(Refrain)

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

Generous God,
may our offerings follow you in generosity
and be used to work for love,
justice, and peace in the world. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Let us pray.

Loving God, we give you thanks today for the example of Christ –
who walked the road to the cross, not knowing,
but believing, that you would give him the victory.

It is not an easy matter, O God,
for us to think about the costs of discipleship,
about how you call us to walk as Jesus walked
and promise us victory in him
only if we are willing to die with him.

Help us, O God, to set our eyes upon the victory of Christ

that has been promised to us,
and set our feet upon the path that leads to it.

We pray too today, O Lord,
that you would assist us to stand
by those others in our midst who are walking by faith.
Help us to minister your hope and your comfort to them
when they face tribulation,
your grace and your forgiveness
when they face trial and temptation.
Enable us to make visible to all our brothers and sisters
the spiritual reality of your constant care.

We pray, O Lord, for the sick and people in suffering
who are known in this congregation.
We remember Brian and Rhonda, Prema and Priya,
Jim and Bobbie, Denis and Dolly, Jim Bird, Naghuia,
Craig, and others whom we name in our hearts.

Please give them your intensive care and healing, strength and hope.
Please lift the hope and joy of their family because of your healing.

We pray as well for our Nation this day –
bless our Government, all those in authority, and every citizen of this land –
making us all a more caring and just people.
We ask it in the name of Christ Jesus your Son,
he who is our Lord, our Brother, and our friend. 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

Friends in Christ,
the Lord has prepared his table for all who love him
and trust in him alone for their salvation.
All who are truly sorry for their sins,
who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour,
and who desire to live in obedience to him,
are now invited to come with gladness
to the table of the Lord.

Jesus said,
“I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

COMMUNION HYMN Lord Jesus Christ TiS 526

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,
you are one with us, Mary's son;
cleansing our souls from all their sin,
pouring your love and goodness in,
Jesus, our love for you we sing, living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, now and every day,
teach us how to pray, Son of God;
You have commanded us to do
this in remembrance, Lord, of you:
into our lives your power breaks through, living Lord

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,
born as one of us, Mary's son;
led out to die on Calvary,
risen from death to set us free,
living Lord Jesus, help us see you are Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, I would come to you,
live my life for you, Son of God.
All your commands I know are true,
your many gifts will make me new,
into my life your power breaks through, living Lord.

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.

Blessing and praise belong to you, gracious and eternal God.

Through your living Word you created all things,

the majesty of the heavens and the glory of the earth.

In your wisdom and goodness, you have made all people
in your image and likeness.

Therefore, with saints and angels and with all creation
we lift up our voices to proclaim the glory of your name:

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.

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.”

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Loving God,

we offer you this bread and this cup,

remembering his death and celebrating his resurrection.
You have made him the light of the nations
and the bearer of justice to the ends of the earth.

Send the Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts.
Make us one with Christ in his self-giving,
that through us he may bind up the broken hearted,
comfort the mourners,
open the eyes of the blind,
and proclaim liberty to the captives;
until justice rolls down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.
In this hope, and as your people, we praise you.

***Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory is yours, God most holy.
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

***We give thanks, almighty God,
that you have refreshed us at your table
by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ.
Strengthen our faith,
increase our love for one another,
and send us forth into the world
united in courage and peace,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.***

The Sending Forth of the People of God

HYMN: Companions on the journey Seasons 8-8

(Refrain)

*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.

(Refrain)

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.

(Refrain)

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BLESSING

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourselves, and to take up the cross and follow him;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you, and remain with you always. Amen

SENDING SONG: May you find peace Seasons 7-26

May you find peace,
may you find hope,
may you find joy this day.
May you find love,
may you find rest
here in this place together. (X2)

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