

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

10 March 2024

Lent 4

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

Give thanks to God,

for God is good.

God's steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to God,

for God is good.

So come, let us bring worship and praise.

HYMN: Guide me, O thou great Redeemer TiS 569

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain
whence the living waters flow:
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

PD; Words: William Williams

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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 he walks on towards his death. We pray that we might take up Christ's courage to walk with love and to seek out justice. And we pray that we might not falter in this task. Amen.

Extinguish a 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.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

*God of promise and hope,
you call us to trust in your way
and set before us paths of faithfulness.
Sometimes we hesitate to follow you
and to make changes in our lives.
Sometimes our priorities and commitments
reflect personal interests
more than your desire for our lives and world.
Free us, O God, that we might be faithful to you
in the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Hear now the loving truth of God: God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned.

And so I declare to you: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

HYMN: Jesus loves me, this I know TiS 229

Jesus loves me, this I know,
and the Bible tells me so;
little ones to him belong,
in his love we shall be strong.

(Refrain)

*Yes, Jesus loves me,
yes, Jesus loves me,
yes, Jesus loves me,
the Bible tells me so.*

Jesus loves me, this I know,
As he loved so long ago,
taking children on his knee,
saying, "Let them come to me."
(Refrain)

Jesus loves me, still today,
walking with me on my way,
wanting as a friend to give
light and love to all who live.
(Refrain)

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Numbers 21:4–9

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom, but the people became discouraged on the way. 5 The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." 6 Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." 9 So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole, and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

John 3:14-21

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not

be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

REFLECTION

A soldier serving overseas received a Dear John letter from his girlfriend back home. Not only was she cutting off their relationship - adding insult to injury - she wrote, "Will you please return my favorite photograph of myself? I need it for my engagement picture in the local newspaper." The poor guy was shocked. But the soldiers in his unit came to his rescue. They went throughout the entire camp and collected pictures of all the other guys' girlfriends. Then they put them all in a shoe box and sent it to the girl along with this note: "Please find your picture, and return the rest. For the life of me, I can't remember which one you were!!"

Pictures can say a lot. Most people have pictures of loved ones in their wallets. Or on their walls at home. Or on their desks at work. Or they use them for wallpapers on their computers. Those pictures are an expression of how much they are loved. And [John 3:16](#)

has always been the snapshot of how much God loves us. It's simple, short, and to the point: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

There was a story of a young man from a wealthy family was about to graduate from high school. It was the custom in that wealthy neighborhood for the parents to give the graduate a nice beautiful car. "Bill and his father had spent months looking at cars, and the week before graduation, they found the perfect car. On the eve of his graduation, his father handed him a gift wrapped Bible. Bill was so angry that he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. He and his father never saw each other again. It was the news of his father's death that brought Bill home again. As he sat one night going through his father's possessions that he was to inherit, he came across the Bible his father had given him. He brushed away the dust and opened it and there was a bank check, dated the day of his graduation - in the exact amount of the car they had chosen together. As I thought about this story, I couldn't help but wonder how many people in this world have done the same thing to God. Literally tossed aside a wonderful promise, because they didn't understand it, or they didn't believe that it was possible.

John 3:16, this is the God's wonderful promise and this is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. John 3:16 has been the best known, best loved, most often recited verse of the whole Bible. Martin Luther once called it the "Gospel within the Gospels." One of the lecturers at UTC, calls John's beautiful expression "One majestic, sweeping,

comprehensive sentence that expresses the essence of Christian belief." John 3 begins with Nicodemus, a man of the Pharisees, coming to Jesus quietly at night. Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born anew or born again in order to see the kingdom of God. "How can one be born when one is old?" Nicodemus wondered aloud. Jesus answered to Nicodemus' question. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Do you remember the movie "The Ten Commandments"? Have you watched it? If you watch that movie you'll remember that the children of Israel were set free from slavery in Egypt after a number of plagues. The children of Israel left Egypt in a joyous parade, loaded down with gifts of gold, animals and precious goods. They came to the Red Sea when a cloud of dust told them Pharaoh had changed his mind... his military might, horse and chariot army were in hot pursuit. God rescued them... Moses raises his hands and the sea parted. They walked across on dry land. When the Egyptians followed, the seas swallowed them. At Mt. Sinai worshiped God and received the Ten Commandments. After leaving Mt. Sinai they travelled like wanderers in the desert. For 40 years they travelled from oasis to oasis, their shoes never wore out, they had manna every day and God provided water from a rock. But what happened? They "became impatient" on the way to the Promised land. "They spoke against God and against Moses," saying, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! We hate this miserable food (manna)! Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them and many Israelites died. The people came crying to Moses... "We have sinned... Ask God to take away the snakes." God told Moses to make a Bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who is bitten can look at the pole and live. And it was so. Now, don't ask me how this worked. I have no idea. Moses simply sees it as another "miracle of God." No different than the crossing of the sea. No different than fresh water flowing from a rock. No different than manna for food every day. The point? God acted in love to save his people from the poison which resulted in death. God said look up and live.

Jesus looks at Nicodemus and said: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up...so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life." In John's Gospel eternal life is not an extended quantity of life that begins at death. Eternal life, rather, is a new quality of life, a new kind of life. Those who believe in Jesus, those who believe in the One who was lifted high on the cross, receive the gift of eternal life. That is the answer to the question of Nicodemus. Nicodemus could not understand how a person could be born again. Jesus tells Nicodemus, Jesus tells us, that we receive a new kind of life, eternal life, when we look in faith to the lifted-up Jesus. That is how we are born again. There is no mystery here. Those who believe in Jesus Christ are born again; they are filled

with eternal life. This is incredibly good news for the human race. How can it be so? It can be so because God so loved the world! The Greek word used for love here points to the kind of love that loves another with no thought of return or reward. That is God's kind of love for us. God does not love us because we deserve to be loved. God does not love us because God gets a reward from loving us. God just loves us. That is all. No reason. No reward. Just loves us. Loves you. Loves me. No matter who you are. No matter how you have lived your life. No matter how great your sins are. God loves you.

God's love is so great!! One of my favourite hymns puts this aspect of God's love in memorable language.

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell.

O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall for evermore endure, The saints' and angels' song.

I still remember that I wept and wept so many times in my life singing this song. This song is exactly what I wanted to say to God every time I realized God's measureless love for me sinner. This is our song, if we have come to know in part that great and immeasurable love of God toward us through Christ Jesus. In the New Testament, the cross is made the measure of God's love. In Romans 5, "But God demonstrates his own [love](#) for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In 1 John 3, "This is how we know what [love](#) is: Jesus Christ laid down his [life](#) for us." God sacrificed his own Son, and Christ sacrificed his own life for people who are some totally unworthy and undeserving of anything.

Brothers and sisters, in this Lenten season, please know and believe that God loves you! He has demonstrated that love for you in Jesus Christ! Do you remember the last Sunday's message? At the end of my reflection, I asked, "If someone comes and tries to tell you that God does not love you, what would you do then?" I suggested one for you. I said, "Take that person to the cross!" The cross explains everything about God's love to us, how much he loves us. Many of us are a bundle of anxieties. What we need is to relax in the knowledge that we are loved. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Do you believe in Christ? Then what in the world are you worried about? Accept his love. Lay your deepest concerns at the foot of the cross. God made a statement on Calvary two thousand years ago. There were two signs that hung above Jesus' head. The unbelieving world saw only one. It read, "King of the

Jews." The believing eye, however, sees another: "In this is love." "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." **Amen.**

HYMN And can it be TiS 209

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain –
for me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, should die for me!

'Tis mystery all! The immortal dies:
who can explore this strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds inquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above
(so free, so infinite his grace!),
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free:
for, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night:
thine eye diffused a quickening ray –
I woke; the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread:
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

PD ; words: Charles Wesley

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

Generous God, we respond to your love with thanks.
Receive these offerings as a token of our gratitude
and a sign of our commitment to walk the road of love and justice. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

God who lifted up the snake for healing in the wilderness,
God who lifted up the broken Jesus to new life,
God who comes to meet us in this place,
we pray to you.

We pray for honest conversation.
We pray for eyes to see the flaws in our own lives
and in the systems and structures in which we live.
We pray for healing in the world.
We pray that we might act for the good of all.
We pray that we will not be content
until all can live and flourish in fullness of life.

We would be the people who follow after Christ Jesus.
We want to live with the same love Jesus shows.
We want to confront injustice
and be agents of transformations as Jesus was.
We want to be honest about our lives.

Today 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,
John and Sue and especially John's mother and father,
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 this in the name of Jesus Christ. 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

Come, all you who thirst,
all you who hunger for the bread of life,
all you whose souls cry out for healing;
Come, come to the feast of life.

The Table of Jesus is our place of gathering;
here we are welcomed, wanted, loved,
here there is a place set for us;
Let us come to the feast of life.

COMMUNION HYMN Let us talents and tongues employ TiS 537

Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy;
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

(Refrain)

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Christ is able to make us one,
at the table he sets the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

(Refrain)

Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share;
God-Immanuel everywhere.

(Refrain)

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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.

Thanks and praise, glory and honour are rightly yours,
our Lord and God, for you alone are worthy.
In time beyond our dreaming
you brought forth life out of darkness,
and in the love of Christ your Son
you set man and woman at the heart of your creation.
For this we praise you with the faithful of every time
and place joining with the whole creation in the eternal hymn:

***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 thank you that you called a covenant people to be a light to the nations.
Through Moses you taught us to love your law,
and in the prophets you cried out for justice.

In the fullness of your mercy you became one with us in Jesus Christ,
who gave himself up for us on the cross.
You make us alive together with him,
that we may rejoice in his presence and share his peace.

***By water and the Spirit
you open the kingdom to all who believe,***

***and welcome us to your table:
for by grace we are saved, through faith.***

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.”

With this bread and this cup

we do as our Saviour commands:

we celebrate the redemption he has won for us.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Pour out the Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine,
that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

Make us one with him, one with each other,
and one in ministry in the world,
until at last we feast with him in the kingdom.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ,
in your holy church,
all honour and glory are yours, Father almighty,
now and for ever. ***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

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Loving God,
we thank you that you have fed us in this sacrament,
united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
in your eternal kingdom.

***We offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.***

The Sending Forth of the People of God
--

HYMN: Kneels at the feet of his friends TiS 640

Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet:
master who acts as a slave to them.

(Refrain)
*Yesu, Yesu, fill us with your love,
show us how to serve
the neighbours we have from you.*

Neighbours are wealthy and poor,
varied in colour and race,
neighbours are near us and far away.
(Refrain)

These are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love;
all these are neighbours to us and you.
(Refrain)

Loving puts us on our knees,

Silently washing their feet:
this is the way we should live with you.
(Refrain)

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BLESSING

God of love,
as in Jesus Christ you gave yourself to us,
so may we give ourselves to you,
living according to your holy will,
and sharing your blessings with others.

May 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 (X2)

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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