

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

April 14, 2024

Easter 3

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.***

CALL TO WORSHIP

Lift your voices to God.

We call on the One who promises to hear us.

In life, in death, in every moment,
God deals graciously with us.

We rejoice in the One who saves us.

We will break the Bread of life in thanksgiving to God.

***We will lift up the Cup of salvation,
drinking deeply from it.***

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here

God is always here

God is with us

God is always with us

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, we gather as your people.

We come to walk a journey together,

to talk and to share along the way,

to feast on bread and wine,

to meet and to know Jesus.

Help us to marvel at all that Jesus has done for us. Amen.

HYMN: Rejoice, the Lord is King TiS 108

Rejoice, the Lord is King:

your Lord and King adore;

Let all give thanks, and sing,

and triumph evermore;

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Jesus the Saviour reigns,

the God of truth and love;

when he had purged our stains,

he took his seat above;

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

His kingdom cannot fail,

he rules o'er earth and heaven;

the keys of death and hell

are to our Jesus given:

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

He sits at God's right hand,

till all his foes submit,

and bow to his command,

and fall beneath his feet:

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

Rejoice in glorious hope;
Jesus the judge shall come,
and take his servants up
to their eternal home:
*We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
the trump of God shall sound, Rejoice!*

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

*Risen Lord, we are sorry
that we fail to recognise you in our midst,
that we are too preoccupied with ourselves.
We are sorry that we let you down,
that we feast and don't invite others to share with us.
We are sorry that we welcome friends
but not always the stranger,
or anyone who makes us feel uncomfortable.*

*Forgive us, Lord.
Help us to be generous people,
our church, our homes – and our hearts – always places of welcome.
Amen.*

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned. Here 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: Halle, halle TiS 720

Halle, halle, hallelujah!
Halle, halle, hallelujah!
Halle, halle, hallelujah!
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Acts 3:12–19

12 When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, “Fellow Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. 14 But you rejected the holy and righteous one and asked to have a murderer given to you, 15 and you killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. 17 “And now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.

Luke 24:36b–48

36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 37 They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering, and he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence. 44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

REFLECTION

In our Gospel reading this morning, we heard, as we heard from the Gospel of John last week, that on the day of his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and showed them the marks of his love, those marks engraved on his hands and feet, and in his side. Then, while reminding them of what he had said before he died, he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures, telling them: "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem." He opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures.

I've thought a bit about this and I've wondered, "Why didn't Jesus do this earlier? Why didn't Jesus open their minds to understand the scriptures and then explain it to them before he died?" Surely it would have made it easier for them - easier for them to believe in him, easier for them to follow him, easier for them to accept the miracle of his resurrection. Surely everything could have gone so much better during the days of Jesus' ministry if his disciples had understood the scriptures at that time. But they didn't understand. Instead, throughout the gospels we see the disciples bumbling and stumbling, and we see Jesus rebuking them and teaching them over and over again what the right way is. So, why did Jesus wait to open their minds so that they could understand the scriptures and thereby understand him? I believe that the answer lies in the fact that the disciples had to experience the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection before they could really understand the Bible. Their hearts and minds could not be opened, they could not possibly understand, until they were prepared for it by all of what they had heard, seen, and felt with Jesus...

I think that many people today are in the same situation, they know the scriptures, but they do not understand them. They do not understand them because they are passive concerning the Word of God, they fail to link their experiences to it and allow the experiences and the prophecies in it to link themselves to them. They haven't entered into the wholeness of the message. Rather, some parts they have accepted, and other parts they have rejected or ignored without ever considering the connections between the parts. Indeed - a lot of us are like the disciples before Easter Sunday. We shrink away from much of what Jesus says - we don't want to hear about carrying the burdens of others, we don't want to hear about suffering for love, we don't want to hear about how good people, people like Jesus, have to die before they can become fully alive. But - my friends - without the one there cannot be the other. We can't have the earth unless we carry the burdens of others. We can't have the Kingdom of heaven without the willingness to put God before our own desires, our own families. We can't have power without the willingness to suffer, and we can't have glory without the willingness to die. Until we understand that, until our minds are opened to see the links between what we are now and

what will be later, between what we experience now and what we will experience later, until we see the links between death and resurrection, the scriptures are a closed book. This is why Jesus did not open the minds of the disciples so that they could understand the scriptures before his resurrection. Until Jesus rose the disciples did not have the experience they needed to have open minds. Friends - Jesus' life, death and resurrection is the link between our experience and the message of the scriptures. He is the link that can open our minds, so that we might understand the scriptures, and indeed so that we might understand our own lives. On the first Easter Sunday Jesus did not give his disciples special knowledge so that they could understand the scriptures. What he did was open their minds, he reminded them of what they had experienced with him, and of what they were even then experiencing with him, and he pointed to the scriptures which spoke of that experience: he made the connections for them.

A grandfather and a grandmother are in a gift shop looking for something to give their granddaughter for her birthday. Suddenly the grandmother spots a beautiful teacup. "Look at this lovely cup", she says to her husband. He picks it up and says, "You're right! This is one of the loveliest teacups I have ever seen." At that point something remarkable happened - something that could only happen in a children's book. The teacup says to the grandparents, "Thank you for the compliment, but I wasn't always beautiful." Instead of being surprised that the cup can talk, the grandfather and grandmother ask it, "What do you mean when you say you weren't always beautiful?"

"Well", says the teacup, "once I was just an ugly, soggy lump of clay. But one day some man with dirty wet hands threw me on a wheel. Then he started turning me around and around until I got so dizzy I couldn't see straight. 'Stop! Stop!', I cried. "But the man with the wet hands said, 'Not Yet!'. Then he started to poke me and punch me until I hurt all over. 'Stop! Stop!', I cried. But the man said 'Not Yet'. "Finally, he did stop. But then he did something much worse. He put me into a furnace. I got hotter and hotter until I couldn't stand it. 'Stop! Stop!', I cried. But the man said 'Not Yet'. "Finally, when I thought I was going to burn up the man took me out of the furnace. Then some short lady began to paint me. The fumes got so bad that they made me feel sick. "Stop, stop!", I cried. 'Not Yet!' said the lady. "Finally, she did stop. But then she gave me back to the man again and he put me back into that awful furnace. This time it was hotter than before. 'Stop! Stop!', I cried. But the man said 'Not Yet'. "Finally, he took me out of the furnace and let me cool. When I was completely cool a pretty lady put me on this shelf, next to this mirror. "When I looked at myself in the mirror, I was amazed. I could not believe what I saw. I was no longer ugly, soggy, and dirty. I was beautiful, firm, and clean. I cried for joy. It was then I realized that all the pain was worthwhile. Without it I would still be an ugly, soggy lump of wet clay. It was then that all the pain took on meaning for me - it had passed - but the beauty it brought has remained." This is the message of all the scripture: Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand.

Jesus waited before he opened the minds of his disciples because he could do no other, the story was not complete until his resurrection occurred. The disciples could not understand the scriptures until they witnessed the fact that he rose from the dead. We too, like the first disciples cannot understand the scriptures until our minds have been opened by our experience with him, and by our faith in his resurrection. We can know a lot about Jesus, but never understand him or experience all that he has in store for us.

One more story to finish – There was a man who was recently converted to the Christian faith. He was asked by one of his unbelieving friends about Jesus: The friend said to him: "I hear you have become a Christian." "Yes", said the man. "Then you must know a great deal about Christ", said the friend, "tell me, what country was he born in?" "I don't know", replied the man. "Well then, what was his age when he died?" asked the friend. "I don't know", replied the man. "Well, can you tell me how many sermons he preached? Or how he was born, or how he did miracles, or how he was raised from the dead?" asked the friend. "I don't know" responded the man. "You certainly know very little for a man who claims to be a Christian", said the friend. "You are right," replied the man, "I am ashamed of how little I know - but this much I do know. Three years ago, I was an alcoholic. I was in debt. My family was falling to pieces. My wife and children would fear my return home each evening. I was desperate. I gave my heart to God. Now I have given up drinking alcohol, we are out of debt, and my wife and I are in love once more. All this Christ has done for me. This much I know....

We can know the biography of Jesus that is found in the scriptures, - we can explore the laws that are written down, and debate the reasons for why this or that happened, - we can gain all kinds of knowledge about scripture, but none of it will give us the understanding that God wants us to have. If we would understand what the scriptures are really all about, then we must not only open them, we must allow Jesus to open our minds - by placing our trust in him, in the one to whom the scriptures point. Then, like the clay in the hands of the potter, like the man who converted to the faith whose life changed, we will truly understand, and we will praise God for it, and for the life he has given us. **Amen.**

HYMN: Christ the Lord is risen today TIS 370

Christ the Lord is risen today: Hallelujah!
Let the whole creation say: Hallelujah!
Raise your joys and triumphs high: Hallelujah!
Sing now, heaven, and earth reply: Hallelujah!

Love's redeeming work is done: Hallelujah!
fought the fight, the battle won: Hallelujah!
vain the stone, the watch, the seal: Hallelujah!
Christ has burst the gates of hell: Hallelujah!

Lives again our glorious king; Hallelujah!
where, O, death, is now your sting? Hallelujah!
Once he died our souls to save; Hallelujah!
where your victory, O grave? Hallelujah!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Hallelujah!
following our exalted Head; Hallelujah!
made like him, like him we rise: Hallelujah!
ours the cross, the grave, the skies: Hallelujah!

PD ; words: Charles Wesley

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

Living Lord Jesus, we give thanks for all that you have done for us
and continue to do for us through the gift of your Spirit.
You welcome us as part of your family, members of God's household.
Help us always to show our gratitude,
not only through these gifts but also through our acceptance of others
and as a welcoming and loving community of faith.
In Jesus' name, we pray. 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.

In Silence, let us pray for the sick and the suffering
who are known in this congregation.
Especially 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, Peter and Sue, Dinah, Robyn, Craig,
and others whom we name in our hearts.

(Silence)

God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer. 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

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him,
who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.
Jesus said, "I am the bread of life;
Those who come to me shall not hunger,
and those who believe in me shall never thirst."

COMMUNION HYMN: Be known to us in breaking bread TIS 514

Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Saviour, abide with us, and spread
your table in our heart.

There share with us in love divine;
your body and your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine,
be our immortal food.

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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.

We give thanks with joyful hearts.

Dispeller of doubts, source of our faith,

we praise you with wonder for caring for us so deeply.

We praise you, O God, for raising Jesus from the dead,

and for this great assurance of your love for us

which we experience in Jesus and through the power of your Spirit.

With joy over prophecies fulfilled, and promises carried out,

we join with faithful people of every time and place to give glory to you:

***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 waved our palms and cried “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday,
we held our breath and fear clutched our hearts once more
with the words “Crucify him” on Good Friday;
so our relief on Easter Day was evident
in our eagerness to join in the acclamation that “Christ is risen.”
Today, we remember those travellers on the road to Emmaus,
who recognised Jesus in the blessing and breaking of the bread.
Like them, we receive Jesus’ blessing on us
as we share in this meal together.

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.”

And now, O God,
breathe your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine,
that through them, we may receive and be nourished by the life of Christ.
Bless us all, O God,
as we offer our praise and our worship
in the name of Jesus Christ,
our risen Lord and Saviour. 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

Receive this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ,
and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We have been reminded of Jesus' sacrificial love for us
as we have shared this meal together
and through the power of the Holy Spirit,
we have received his life in us.

Gracious God,
we make our thanks visible by serving you and one another
all those for whom Christ died.
Send us in the power of your Spirit
to reveal your love in all we do and say.
We pray in the name of our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Sending Forth of the People of God
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HYMN: Draw the circle wide online resource

(Refrain)

Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.

Let this be our song: no one stands alone.

Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

God the still point of the circle
round whom all creation turns;
nothing lost, but held together
in God's gracious arms.

(Refrain)

Let our hearts touch far horizons
so encompass great and small;
let our loving know no borders,
faithful to God's call.

(Refrain)

Let the dream we dreamed be larger
than we ever dreamed before;
let the dream of Christ be in us,
open every door.

(Refrain)

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BLESSING

Go in peace,
love and care for one another in Christ's name,
and may the blessing of God the Creator,
the peace of God the Christ,
and the power of God the Holy Spirit,
abide with you as you travel where he leads you,
both now and forevermore. Amen

SENDING SONG: Jesus Came Bringing Us Seasons 3 – 7

Jesus came bringing us hope.
Jesus came bringing us hope.
Jesus came bringing us hope.
Hallelujah for evermore!

Jesus came showing God's peace.
Jesus came showing God's peace.
Jesus came showing God's peace.
Hallelujah for evermore!

Jesus came bringing us joy.
Jesus came bringing us joy.
Jesus came bringing us joy.
Hallelujah for evermore!

Jesus came showing God's love.
Jesus came showing God's love.
Jesus came showing God's love.
Hallelujah for evermore!

Jesus came showing justice.
Jesus came showing justice.
Jesus came showing justice.
Hallelujah for evermore!