

## **ORDER OF SERVICE KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH 16/6/24**

### **THE GOD WHO LOVES SMALL THINGS**

**WELCOME:**

**CALL TO WORSHIP:**

God answers our prayers and protects us in the day of trouble; strengthens those whom we cherish close to our hearts. Some take pride in what they can see and hear, but we take pride in God's activity in our lives. This gives us good reason to shout with joy for we believe that when we do call upon the Lord, our prayers are heard and answered. Let us worship God with gladness and joy.

Christ our brother, in parable and story you bring to life the dream of God's reign. Create this dream in us that we might live no longer for ourselves but for you. In gathering today, may your words of life be scattered around and planted in us, that they might grow beyond our imagining. Amen.

**LIGHT THE CANDLE:** God is here.....God is with us.....

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

We pay our respects to the elders past, present and emerging of the Bidjegal people of the Eora nation who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. We acknowledge that this land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal land.

### **KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH VISION AND VALUES**

Our vision is to be a loving and caring community, sharing God's love with the world.

We are a congregation who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles. We are creating a safe place for the community and are sharing the journey of life and faith.

**SING:** For the fruits of all creation TIS/168

For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God;  
for his gifts to every nation, thanks be to God;  
for the ploughing, sowing reaping,  
silent growth while we are sleeping,  
future needs in earth's safe keeping, thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour, God's will is done;  
in the help we give our neighbour God's will is done;  
In our worldwide task of caring  
for the hungry and despairing,  
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God;  
for the good we all inherit, thanks be to God;  
for the wonders that astound us,

for the truths that still confound us,  
most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.

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**PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

Lord Jesus Christ, we remember with gratitude those people who generously sowed the seeds of faith in our lives.

*Pause for a time of reflection*

Above all, we recognise how you have blessed our lives with the gift of the Holy Spirit so that our faith has miraculously and mysteriously grown.

Forgive us when we fail to plant any seeds of faith in the lives of others;  
the times when our personal agendas become more important than yours;  
the times when we have denied others the opportunity to grow their faith  
through our lack of interest or involvement;  
the times when our lives become so entangled with the values of the world,  
that we forget what you have said and done and promised.

Lord Jesus Christ, we know that when we become disconnected from you, our lives becomes parched and unfruitful and our faith becomes stunted and dry. Bless and renew our lives, we pray, so that we remain connected to you at all times and in all places, so that our faith grows strong and vigorous, bearing the fruit of your mercy, your love, and your undying life. Amen.

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE:**

As the Apostle Paul wrote: “ if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” The good news therefore is this: in Jesus Christ we are made new, we are loved, we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

**PEACE:**

**SING:** Faith will not grow from words alone TIS/691

Faith will not grow from words alone,  
from proofs provided, scripture known;  
our faith must feel its way about,  
and live with question-marks and doubt.

The pattern Jesus showed, we share:  
life comes through death, hope through despair.  
God is made known in brokenness,  
and faith feeds on God’s emptiness.

The church still tells how Jesus came  
through death to glorious life again –  
the strangest story! Yet, maybe,

our faith will thrive on mystery.

Faith takes the little that we know,  
and calls for hope, and tells us: Go!  
Love and take courage, come what may;  
Christ will be with us on the way.

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## **READING FROM THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES : 1 Samuel 15:34 - 16:13**

<sup>34</sup>Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. <sup>35</sup>Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

<sup>16</sup>The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." <sup>2</sup>Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" <sup>3</sup>Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." <sup>4</sup>Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" <sup>5</sup>He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD." <sup>7</sup>But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." <sup>8</sup>Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>9</sup>Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>10</sup>Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." <sup>11</sup>Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." <sup>12</sup>He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." <sup>13</sup>Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

## **READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE: Mark 4: 26 – 34**

<sup>26</sup>He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, <sup>27</sup>and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. <sup>28</sup>The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup>But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

<sup>30</sup>He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? <sup>31</sup>It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup>yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

<sup>33</sup>With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; <sup>34</sup>he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

### **REFLECTION:**

If someone asked you about the kingdom of God, how would you explain it to them. In today's gospel reading, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a seed. Most people seem to agree that the key phrase in this story is in v. 28, the phrase "all by itself." "All by itself" should be one of the key words that make sense in the business of God's kingdom. The Greek word behind this phrase is the word *automatos*. It's where we get our English word "automatic" from, and it means "without visible cause." Even though the farmer plants the seeds and reaps the harvest, the growth in between is "without visible cause." And like farmers we're to plant seeds, and when time comes, we are to reap the harvest, and the jobs in between always belong to God. The farmer will always be nothing more than a planter and a harvester. The farmer will never be a grower, because seeds grow apart from the farmer's efforts. The sprouting, growth, maturity, and production of a seed is built into the seed and the soil, and it happens apart from human cause. We can study the process, we can assign technical scientific names to the process, but we can't create the process. Growth belongs to God's job. God calls us to be active in planting seeds, to share the message, to shine the light with our words, our actions, and our community. As a church we're committed to planting seeds, whether it's through some of our regular programs we do in our church, whether it's through our ordinary daily lives. And if we do, we'll be always guaranteed to see the harvest time coming. And in between, God will do his jobs. That's how many stories in the book of Acts come to an end. That's how many missionary stories started and ended. God is the one who grows the seeds and makes them bear fruit. However, unless you plant the seed, unless you initiate, you'll hardly get to the harvest because God cannot grow a seed which hadn't been planted anyway.

Jesus continues to compare God's Kingdom to a mustard seed. A mustard seed is so small. Yet this very tiny seed grows into a large bush, a bush that often reaches six to ten feet tall.

The point is that, no matter how small or trivial the ministry of our seed planting might appear, God can still make them grow huge. It's so big that even birds take shelter in it. Think about our storehouse. It started out small 30 years ago, but now it has become a big tree that can provide comfort and help to many people in our community. This reminds us to not despise small beginnings. Often, it's the small where God is working the most powerfully. Don't despise the little things you do in your lives for others and for God. Let us not despise the little things we do in our church. Don't be disheartened when there appears to be no result visible. It might take time but it always grows and you'll see it when time comes. It's often the little things where God is working the most in hidden and mysterious ways.

One June morning 170 years ago, Henri Dunant woke up and opened his window in his beloved Switzerland. He heard an excited babble down in the street and quickly went down to see what was going on. He didn't hear much at first, but he caught the words "fighting" and "war" through all the confusion. Eventually he was able to determine that a war had started in Italy. So he quickly packed a few things and set out. He wanted to see for himself just what was going on. Henri arrived in Italy and he saw soldiers fighting on the side of a hill near the town he was staying. It seemed that everyone was shooting at everyone else. He watched as men were hit by bullets, gave horrible cries, and fell to the ground. Henri had never seen anything like this before. He felt that he should do something to help the wounded men. So when the fighting stopped at sunset he went to the nearby town to ask people to go to the battlefield with him. Ordinary citizens: farmers, bakers and tailors responded at once. They spent the night there giving as much aid as they could to the wounded men. It was hard for Henri to forget what he had seen once he returned home, so he decided to write down his experiences. He described the horrible sight of battle and men being shot. He also suggested that every country should have a relief society, a kind of emergency aid service to help wounded soldiers. It was five years later before the first rescue society was organized in Geneva, Switzerland in 1864. It was called the Red Cross. And soon other countries joined the society. Everyone forgot all about Henri until an article appeared in a newspaper in 1895. In 1901 he was given the very first Nobel peace prize. Henri planted a seed that would sprout and help millions of people all over the world. That's the way the kingdom works - great harvests from tiny seeds.

One more important thing that God wants us to think about this morning through our gospel reading is faith. Jesus is speaking about the kingdom of God and how that kingdom grows. It grows with faith, unwavering faith, a faith that we cannot see or understand. Jesus tells a story about a farmer, any farmer, who goes out to plant his seeds into the ground. Then instead of worrying about the seeds, lets nature take its course, and the seeds grow and grow, then the farmer goes out and harvests the fruit of the harvest. The words in the text of sleep and rise, night and day means the man didn't do anything to the seed, but trusted in the natural order of things for he knew he could do nothing to help the seed grow. We can understand that. No matter how much we worry about the crop, how much we complain about the wet weather, or the dry weather, in the end we cannot do anything. We must let the natural order of things be done. Sometimes it is very difficult for us to surrender to the natural order. Sometimes we cannot let go. If we do our job of planting the seed right, the seed will

do its job and eventually the harvest will be there. Jesus is comparing the kingdom of God to this idea of a natural order in the growing of crops and the harvest. He is saying that just as we need to surrender to the natural order in growing crops, in the kingdom of God we need to surrender to the reign or rule of God in his kingdom. The kingdom of God for Jesus was not a place on this earth, it was not a kingdom. The kingdom of God is God's rule, is God's reign on this earth. Jesus is saying that God rules his kingdom, God reigns not us. What you and I are called to have is faith, faith that God is the ruler of his kingdom, faith that God is working even when we cannot see him, even when we have lost sight of him, even when we see no answer from him, we must believe that he is still ruling, he is still in charge, he is still in control.

I remember a young woman long time ago when I was working in a Korean church as a youth worker. She was going through a serious crisis in her life. It was extremely difficult for her to do what she had to do, and I assured her that God would help her through her time of trial and instantly she replied angrily almost in a sneer: "Look Deok Hee, you know I have been a good church member, but the first time I really need God he is nowhere around. I have prayed and I got no answer. I asked for help, nothing. Then I knew what I am going to do, I am going to have to do by myself. In all of this, I don't even know whether God exists or not. I have searched, but I can't find him." Many of us can tell the same story or something similar. Many of us have at times wondered if God is really real. We wonder if he is active in his kingdom, whether he is working or just leaving us to our own ends. It is many times in these dark hours that we come to a vital, lasting relationship with God. When we thought we had lost him in the pain and frustration of life, it is in those very kinds of circumstances that we end up finding God.

I would like to say this to you this morning, "Trust God enough to believe he knows what he is doing." When his actions don't make sense, trust him. Even when difficult things happen to you and those around you that you cannot understand, trust him. Good times and bad, happy and sad, trust him. No matter what kind of difficult situations you have, we have, our church has, it can be overcome with our faith, unwavering faith, a faith that we cannot see or understand.

Brothers and sisters, like farmers we're to plant seeds, and when time comes, we are to reap the harvest, and the jobs in between always belong to God. The point is that, no matter how small or trivial the ministry of our seed planting might appear, God can still make them grow huge. What we all have to do is trust in God. When we plant something in our ministry, when we initiate something for God and for others, there is always growth involved. Everything and everyone come to grow and bear fruit. It does all by itself, automatically, because that's what happens when God rules and reigns in our lives. Amen.

**SING:**            Song of Faith            TIS/153  
Song of faith that sings forever  
through God's people, ages long,  
Word that holds the world together  
when our hearts take up the song,

always, always somewhere sounding,  
though the source we do not see,  
counterpoint to all despairing  
it is hope that sets the key.

Song of faith in exultation,  
rising through the vaults of prayer,  
tune of simple celebration  
offered up in open air,  
song in chapel and cathedral,  
descant to our daily tone,  
song from sickbed or in prison:  
faith must often sing alone.

And when life would overwhelm us,  
when there seems no song to sing,  
hear the constant voice of courage  
out of fear and suffering:  
all who've loved and trusted Jesus,  
all who lift us to be strong,  
endless, endless are the voices  
of the faith that makes the song.

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### **OFFERING:**

God of goodness, it is easy to think that the smallness of our lives and our resources can do little in a huge world of pain and brokenness, but your words tell us it is not true. Even that which we give here, even the giving of our time and energy shapes the world for good. Amen.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

### **PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:**

Beautiful God, caring God,  
We bring to you the prayers of our hearts.

Each of us carries burdens, worries, stress.  
We share them with you now,  
inviting your presence, involvement, wisdom, and help.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those in our neighbourhood and nation,  
for those struggling to make ends meet,

for all those whose lives are unravelling  
through circumstances beyond their control.  
Be with those bound up in our hospitals,  
our prisons and legal systems,  
and with all those sleeping rough.  
Bring strength, hope, change.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for our world, for those places of conflict and despair, for the many who live on so little, for those met by disaster – natural or human-made.

*Silence*

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Grow your seeds of hope, loving God.  
Make homes of rest and welcome for all.  
Show us when and where to get our hands dirty.  
Come, Lord, come. Amen.

**SING:**            God! When human bonds are broken TIS/683

God! When human bonds are broken  
and we lack the love or skill  
to restore the hope of healing,  
give us grace and make us still.

Through that stillness, with your Spirit  
come into our world of stress,  
for the sake of Christ forgiving;  
all the failures we confess.

You in us are bruised and broken:  
hear us as we seek release  
from the pain of earlier living;  
set us free and grant us peace.

Send us, God of new beginnings,  
humbly hopeful into life.  
Use us as a means of blessing:  
make us stronger, give us faith.

Give us faith to be more faithful,  
give us hope to be more true,  
give us love to go on learning:



God! Encourage and renew!

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## **BLESSING**

Go from here knowing that you are securely planted in the protection and strength of God connected to the life and love of Jesus Christ sustained by the vitality and power of the Holy Spirit.

Go in the hope of the God who made you.

Go in the joy of the God who goes alongside you.

Go in the love of the God who always has and always will dwell in you. Amen

**SENDING OUT SONG:**    God gives us a future                    TIS/687

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

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

Holy Spirit, teach us  
how to read the signs,  
how to meet the challenge  
of our troubled times.  
Love us into action,  
stir us into prayer,  
till we choose God's life, and  
find our future there.

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