

**ORDER OF SERVICE
KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH AUGUST 18, 2024
JESUS: THE BREAD OF LIFE**

WELCOME:

CALL TO WORSHIP:

The world is alive with the goodness of God.
Through Christ, each moment is a sacrament of wonder and joy.
Let us centre our being on the one who reveals
the character and nature of the divine,
to be filled with God's grace,
dwelling in love for all.
Let us worship our God.

Holy and eternal mystery,
you draw us into your presence
through the wonder and beauty of your being.
Your truth is eternal, and your guidance is sure.
Come, breathe your Spirit into your people
gathered here to worship you.
Open your living Word to us
that we may discern your call on our lives
and be filled with love for one another.
Come, Holy Spirit, and make this hour your own. Amen.

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

As we gather together in this time and place, let us acknowledge the Bidjegal people of the Eora nation who have gathered, baked bread, shared food, nourished each other in story and song for thousands of years. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, who have handed down stories, songs, recipes, and wisdom. Let us learn from the First People of this land, listening to their innate knowledge of how to live in this land in harmony with all living things.

KUC 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 sharing the journey of life and faith.

SING: Sing Praise to God who reigns above TIS/110

Sing praise to God who reigns above,
the God of all creation,
the God of power, the God of love,
the God of our salvation;
with healing balm my soul is filled
and every faithless murmur stilled:
to God all praise and glory.

What God's almighty power has made
that will he ever cherish,
and will, unfailing, soon and late,
with lovingkindness nourish;
and where God rules in kingly might there all is just and all is right:
to God all praise and glory.

The Lord is never far away,
but, through all grief distressing
an ever present help and stay,
our peace, and joy, and blessing;
as with a mother's tender hand
God gently leads the chosen band:
to God all praise and glory.

Let all who name Christ's holy name
give God all praise and glory;
let all who own his power proclaim
aloud the wondrous story!
Cast each false idol from its throne,
the Lord is God, and he alone:
to God all praise and glory.

So come before his countenance
and leap in exultation;
now gladly pay your due of praise
in joyful celebration.
Take courage in the Lord, my heart;
refreshed in him, play your full part:
to God all praise and glory.

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Merciful God,
our limited minds find it hard to grasp the fullness of your nature.
Your wisdom is beyond all fathoming.
Your creativity generates all the beauty that surrounds us.
We pray that you will forgive us that, so often, we take all
of your goodness and providential care for granted.
When you come to us, we so often ignore you.
Caught up in the routine of every day, we crowd you out
and are deaf to your voice.
When you invite us into moments of mystery and wonder,
we are blind and deaf to all you are and what you want for us.
Forgive us, we pray.
Help us to offer our time and energy more fully to your mission.
Equip us for the tasks before us
and urge us into your service.
When we find it hard to understand all your ways,
reveal your will and the deep truths of Christ's gospel.
In and through your mercy, we offer our prayer. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

Christ is the foundation of our life.

In him is the gift of eternal life.

Know this – by grace, through faith, we are forgiven.

There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING

God of abundant grace,

we worship and adore you.

Your mercy is without limit,

and your goodness envelops us all the days of our lives.

When we were confused and overwhelmed by the world,

you sought us out so that we could see a better way forward.

When we were lost in sin, you restored us

and enabled us to live in freedom.

The extent of your love is overwhelming

and we rejoice in your presence.

May we never grow distracted or complacent toward your divine will.

May we always bring honour to your name

and remain steadfast in your service. Amen.

PEACE:

SING: Christ be our Light ATS/313

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

light for the world to see.

Refrain

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

Refrain

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,

shared until all are fed.

Refrain

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others

walls made of living stone.

Refrain

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Refrain

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READING FROM THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES:

1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

¹⁰Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem.

¹²So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

³Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. ⁴The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" ¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. ¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES:

John 6:51-58

⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." ⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

REFLECTION:

1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14, John 6:51-58.

A little child in church for the first time watched as the ushers passed the offering plates. When they neared the pew where he sat, the little boy told his father in a loud voice so that everyone could hear: "Daddy, don't pay for me, I'm under five." In the Bible, there are some difficult passages that don't appear to make much sense at all. Some passages in the Bible are quite confusing and sometimes tricky, and we read them and often we don't understand them. The story we have read together today is one of them. In the story, the way Jesus handles this situation is confusing, because some of the things Jesus is saying are upsetting his followers, and it seems that he does not make it easier, but harder for them. Our natural instinct is to take down any barriers in people's way and help them get past those barriers. If someone finds something hard to understand, we want to explain it. If someone finds something difficult, we want to make it easier. If there is something in their way, we want to move it. And certainly this is what we would expect of Jesus. But what is surprising is that this is not what Jesus does. Instead of making it easier to believe, he seems to make it harder. Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him". "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they said. It offended them greatly. At this, the Bible says that the people said to each other, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" And many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. The question is, why did Jesus do that? Why? It was really hard for them to understand what Jesus was saying about eating the flesh and drinking the blood.

One Sunday morning, an elderly pastor found a small box containing 6 eggs and a hundred one-dollar bills deep in the wardrobe. He called his wife into the wardrobe to ask her about the box and its contents. Embarrassed, she admitted having hidden the box for the entire 30 years of their marriage. Disappointed and hurt, the pastor asked her, "Why?" The wife replied that she didn't want to hurt his feelings. He asked her how the box could have hurt his feelings. She said that every time he had delivered a poor sermon, she had placed an egg in the box. The pastor felt that 6 poor sermons in 30 years was certainly nothing to feel bad about, so he asked her what the one hundred one-dollar bills was for. She replied, "Each time I got a dozen eggs, I sold them to the neighbours for a dollar!" In defence of the elderly Pastor, I must say that sometimes God's word is not received well. We might hear things that we do not want to hear and so God's word is sometimes discomfoting. This is more so when it falls on the ears of those who have a hard time believing. To the Corinthian Church the apostle Paul once said, "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God". Yes, it is the power of God.

I have read the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation many times. And I have done my preaching more than 2000 times for last 30 years. But I still believe that the Bible is sometimes hard to understand. One of the reasons for those confusions is the simple fact

that the Bible didn't drop from the hand of God in heaven. The Bible contains all sorts of stories, parables, reflections, cultures, traditions and events that all sorts of people had experienced about God. The Bible also contains many of the teachings and life stories of Jesus Christ, and the teachings and stories of the first century disciples who had learned from Jesus directly and indirectly. Though those 66 different books we have in the Bible were chosen in the careful and prayerful processes somewhere in the 4th Century, we are never to overlook the fact that those books were written by different individuals and groups in different contexts over many centuries. That is why we have many questions and confusions as we read the Bible. We can't find answers to all of these questions. What I want to say is that the most important thing in reading our Bible is that we are to experience God through the stories of those who have lived and experienced God many centuries ago. We all know about God through the Bible but it is not all about God. As they have never learnt fully about God, we, too, can never do that. No matter how hard or often you read and study your Bible, you never fully know about God. So, it is never wise to claim our concepts of God against others because when we do that we are actually claiming our experiences of God to others. We only share with others our experiences and help them to experience God so they know what we're doing and saying. God is never fully understood. 'God is beyond all human understandings, God is all mystery, God is all knowing and all powerful'. Bible definitely contains the words and deeds of God, and the stories and experiences of the people who had experienced God, but it doesn't mean that the Bible itself is God. Careful interpretations, rightful reflections, and humble adaptations are must when you read your Bible. When you begin your Bible too literally, it often makes God stop breathing and living in your present contexts. God is never confined in human cultures like writings. If you want to write a biography about someone you know, it only contains all the stories and facts on that someone's life from the time of birth to the time of death of that someone. However, what if that someone that you attempt to write about never dies. How could you possibly contain all the facts and histories about that someone's life while you will die as a writer and that someone will never die as an object of your writing?

Verses 51 and 52 in John 6, 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If you eat this bread, you will live forever. The bread that I will give you is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live.' This started an angry argument among them. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat" they asked. Actually, it is a quite comforting story because it points out that our 21'st century Christians are not the only ones who so often try to read the Bible literally. The first century people who had heard Jesus directly must have been so mixed up to the point of being almost stupid. Jesus still says, "The bread I give you is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live." It is his invitation to you that you might come to him personally, and touch and taste him personally, and experience him personally. We celebrate Holy Communion on the second and the fourth Sunday of the month in our worship. We welcome everyone to participate. What is Holy Communion? At the communion table when the bread and wine is consecrated and blessed, it is no longer the bread and wine/juice from the store. The Spirit of God descends upon and enters these sacraments and it becomes holy and life giving. What is going on when we celebrate Holy Communion together? We believe that Holy Communion is a sacrament --

it is something visible that invites us to receive the invisible grace of God. What does it mean? We believe that when we gather to worship and participate together in the sacrament of Holy Communion, we are experiencing God's activity in our lives. We experience the presence of Jesus Christ that he is with us today, we experience Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us, we experience God's power of love for us and for the whole world. We come to him personally, and touch and taste him personally, and experience him personally in our Holy Communion. To the believer, the body of Jesus is "Real food" and his blood is "Real drink". As you and I continue to feed on him spiritually and experience him personally, our lives will gradually be transformed and we will reach a point when it is no more that we live but Christ who lives in us. Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them."

Dear friends, we all know that God is everywhere but that God must start from somewhere to be experienced. Where is somewhere? Somewhere is you. You'll never know God until you experience him in your ordinary life and relationships. I want to ask you all this question. Do you experience God in your life? Do you feel God's presence in your life? Do you touch and taste God personally? This morning, God is calling you to experience him, his love on the cross, his power of love for us, his unconditional and everlasting love for us and for the whole world. Let us open our minds and hearts and ears together, and listen to God, and let's say, "Lord, I want to touch you, I want to taste you, I want to experience you." Amen.

SING: O let the Son of God enfold you TIS/655
O, let the Son of God enfold you with his Spirit and his love;
let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul;
O, let him have the things that hold you
and his Spirit, like a dove,
will descend upon your life and make you whole.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives;
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives.

O come and sing this song with gladness as your hearts are filled with joy;
lift your hands in sweet surrender to his name;
O, give him all your tears and sadness, give Him all your years of pain,
and you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives;
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives.

So as you worship God in earnest, lay your burdens at his feet,
and allow God's love to work within your heart.
O let the Holy Spirit fill you and direct your every day,
and you know you'll never be alone again.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives;
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives.

So take God's love to those around you,
show them Jesus every day
in the way you serve and live your life for him.
O bring the light into the darkness, show them there's no better way,
than in living life in Jesus' name.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives;
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives.

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OFFERING:

Jesus is the bread of life.
The goodness of God extends to all.
It is through our generosity that God's vision of equity and justice is extended.

Bread of Life,
receive the offering we bring and the offering of our lives
that the abundance of your provision
may be shared with all people,
and that the common good may be realised
as an expression of your love for the world. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

Let us bring our prayers for others.

Holy one,
we pray for all who do not know
of your providential care this day.
We pray for those who will go hungry today.
We pray for all who have no home of rest and peace,
who wonder what the future will bring.

We pray for those who live in fear –
for families that experience domestic violence as the norm;
for parents who cannot provide for their children;
for places where the home is a place of threat and hostility.

Gracious God, we know that your way is one
of restorative justice, peace, and equity.
We pray for peace – peace between nations;
peace between neighbours;
peace in the hearts of all.

Creator of all that is,
as our world stands on the edge of disaster,
help us to find ways to avert ecological destruction.
We long for the day when there will be pure water
and clean air in every land.

And finally, we pray for all known to us
who need your healing touch this day. (Silent prayer)
In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

SING: Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord TIS/390

Alleluia, alleluia,
give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia,
give praise to his name.

Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
he is the king of creation.
Alleluia, alleluia,
give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia,
give praise to his name.

Spread the good news o'er all the earth:
Jesus has died and has risen.
Alleluia, alleluia,
give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia,
give praise to his name.

We have been crucified with Christ;
now we shall live forever.
Alleluia, alleluia,
give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia,
give praise to his name.

God has proclaimed his gracious gift:
new life for all! Alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia,
give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia,
give praise to his name.

Come, let us praise our living God,
joyfully sing to our Saviour.
Alleluia, alleluia,
give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia,
give praise to his name.

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BLESSING:

As Christ's body and blood are sacraments of life, we go to share his message of abundant life with all. We are bearers of the risen one, whose gospel of loving kindness transforms and sustains the human soul.

May we be filled with the Spirit's power as we seek to serve with generous hearts. May the love of God be in our hearts. May the truth of Christ nourish our nation. May the power of the Holy Spirit be in all we say and do. This day and forever more. Amen.

SING: 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.

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.

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!

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.

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!

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