

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
25 August 2024
14th Sunday after Pentecost

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:

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 and wisdom. Let us learn from the First Peoples of this land, listening to their innate knowledge of how to live in this land in harmony with all living things.

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 *(Based on Psalm 84)*

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young, before you O Lord of hosts.
Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.
For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here

God is always here

God is with us

God is always with us

OPENING PRAYER

In the beauty of this place,

we have come to pray, to worship, to receive healing and hope.

We come from the struggles and triumphs of the week,
needing to feel the comforting presence of God.

Lord, be with us this day.

Calm and comfort our souls.

Cause us to rejoice that you have provided a special place

where we may gather to talk of your presence and love; to sing your praises;
and to be empowered to go forth to serve you.

In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.

HYMN: The love of God is greater far TiS 151

The love of God is greater far
than tongue or pen can ever tell;

it goes beyond the furthest star,
and reaches to the lowest hell.

The guilty pair bowed down with care

God gave his Son to win;

His erring child he reconciled,

and pardoned every sin.

(Refrain)

O love of God, how rich and pure;

how measureless and strong!

It shall forevermore endure,

the saints' and angels' song.

When time at last shall pass away,
and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall;

when those who here refuse to pray
on rocks and hills and mountains call;

God's love, so sure, shall still endure

all measureless and strong;
redeeming grace to Adam's race,
the saints' and angels' song.
(Refrain)

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
and were the skies of parchment made;
were every stalk on earth a quill,
and everyone a scribe by trade;
to write the love of God above
would drain the ocean dry;
nor could the scroll contain the whole,
though stretched from sky to sky.
(Refrain)

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, at times, we have great intentions,
but following Jesus' way can be difficult.
When we would prefer an easier path
and avoid the hard work of loving our neighbours.

God, forgive us.

When we would prefer a less demanding teacher
and look for simple, uncomplicated answers.

God, forgive us.

When we would prefer an effortless life
and ignore the pain and suffering of others.

God, forgive us.

When we would prefer a straightforward week
and sidestep confronting the injustices in our world.

God, forgive us.

Meet us in our brokenness and weakness.
Strengthen and embolden us to follow
in the footsteps of Jesus with courage. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Our God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving
kindness. Hear then Christ's words of grace:
Our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

HYMN: As the deer pants TiS 703 or P&W 445

As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

I want you more than gold or silver,
only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
and the apple of my eye.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

You're my friend and you are my brother
even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other,
so much more than anything.
You alone are my strength and shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Ephesians 6: 10-20

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; 11 put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, 12 for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness 15 and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

John 6: 56-69

56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” 59 He said these things while he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum. 60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” 61 But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him. 65 And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” 66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. 67 So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

REFLECTION

A few years ago, two South Korean soldiers were severely injured by the explosion of land mines which North Korean soldiers planted near one of the South's military

guard posts. One soldier lost both legs in the first blast, involving two mines. The other soldier lost one leg in a second explosion as he tried to help his wounded colleague to safety. Both of South and North Korean armies exchanged gunfire several times and went into a state of high alert. Today, there is still a constant threat of war and high tension between them. Please remember to pray for Korea whenever you get a chance.

The passage we read this morning in Ephesians is about the armour of God. It tells us that we need to wear the full armour of God, because we are in a spiritual battle. This passage gives us a definite answer about the question, "How do we live in this world, surrounded by wars and terrors, and by spiritual forces of evil?" Paul firstly urges us to be strong in the Lord, and then put on the full armour of God; the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the last weapon is the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Lastly, Paul continually urges us to pray in the spirit on all occasions. What we have to remember is that if we want to be strong in the Lord as we face the difficult world, we have got to wear God's armour. We have got to know the word of God and live it out. But we also need to pray. If we forget to do any of these things, we are living in our own strength and we won't last very long. So we need to pray for ourselves. We need to keep on praying for others too, and for our world as well. If God is the one with all the mighty power to sustain us in our struggle, then we need to ask him for it.

Do you remember the last Sunday's reading in John's gospel chapter 6? Verses 51 and 52 say, '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.' Jesus is the bread of life from heaven was the theme of the last Sunday. It has been the theme of this Month as lectionary readings. 'Jesus is the bread of life from heaven' is still the theme of this Sunday as well. V 56, the first verse of our reading this morning says, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them." As with many of those who had followed Jesus around the land of Israel and Palestine 2000 years ago, this statement was too hard for them. "Eating flesh, drinking blood, those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them." Too hard for them to accept. Too hard for them to believe. Too hard for them to commit themselves too. Many of his followers heard this and said, "This teaching is too hard, who can understand it?" "Christ lives in us and we live in him?". "What does it mean by that?"

Here in a bookcase is a book which a man has never read. It may be the glory and the wonder of the tragedies of Shakespeare. Or it may be the wisdom and insight of a well-known wise man; but as long as it remains unread upon his bookshelves it is external to him. In other words, the book is outside him though the book belongs to

him. But one day he takes it down and reads it. He is thrilled and fascinated and moved. The story sticks to him; the great lines remain in his memory; now when he wants to, he can take that wonder out from inside himself and remember it and think about it and feed his mind and his heart upon it. Once the book was outside him. Now it is right inside him and his soul, mind and heart now live on it. It is that way with any great experience in life. It remains outside until you take it inside yourself.

One day a minister was walking along the ocean with his small son. The boy had been questioning his father about recent sermon about Christ dwelling in his people. The boy said, "Dad, I cannot understand how Christ can live in us and we live in him at the same time." As they walked further down the beach, the father noticed an empty bottle with a cork in it, taking the bottle, he half filled it with water and flung it far into the ocean. Then he said, "Son, the sea is in the bottle and the bottle is in the sea. As it bobs up and down in the sea, it is a picture of life and motion of life in Christ." Part of the ocean was in the bottle and at the same time the bottle was in the ocean. In a dark, stormy night with monstrous waves, the bottle is still in the ocean. Wherever the bottle goes, it will be still in the ocean with some part of the ocean in it. Likewise, Christ lives in us and we in him. No matter what the weather, no matter what the circumstances, we will be still in Christ with Christ being in us. Only when Jesus enters into our hearts we can feed upon the life and the strength that Jesus gives to us. When he told us to eat his flesh and drink his blood, he was telling us to feed our hearts and souls and minds on his humanity, and to revitalise our lives with his life until we are filled with his life, and until he becomes a real in our every, ordinary life.

The passages found in John chapter 6 for the past three weeks all point to Jesus as our true food of heaven. However, I don't think that Jesus only had in mind a church-based communion or any sacramental worship when he said he is food of heaven. Today's story did not take place in places like synagogue or temple. It wasn't the Last Supper; it wasn't a sermon told in the Upper Room. Today's story was happening in the scene of a picnic meal on a hillside near Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. For John, Jesus was his everyday food of heaven. He had to have Jesus everyday. And it is still applied to us. For Christians every meal is a sacrament. It is true that the Sacrament or Communion is a special appointment with God; it is true that in Sacrament we remember and celebrate Jesus' life and his death that had actually happened twenty centuries ago; it is true that through worship and sacrament we might enter into the nearer presence of the Risen Christ. But it is also true that every meal is a sacrament. A meal in the humblest kitchen, in the richest palaces, or in local restaurants, every, ordinary meal is a holy communion. Every conversation, every encounter, every relationship, every meal, promises us the very presence of Jesus Christ.

Many of his followers heard this and said, "This teaching is too hard. Who can accept it?" The Greek word for hard is skleros, which means not hard to understand; but hard to follow. To this day many a people refuse Christ, not because he puzzles intellect, but because he challenges their lives, not hard to understand; but hard to follow. Jesus' ministry and teachings challenged many of his followers of first century Palestine. Many of them left Jesus, not because Jesus was hard to understand, but hard to follow. It was a terrible sadness that so many of them left Jesus after they saw and experienced all sorts of signs and wonders that Jesus had shown. Verses 67 and onwards well describe how Jesus felt left alone. "So he asked the twelve disciples, 'Do you want to leave too?'" Do you remember what the Simon Peter answered to this question? He said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Jesus is with us everywhere. Jesus is always with us encouraging us and blessing us in his grace, but at the same time, Jesus is with us challenging us and challenging our lives. Jesus' words and teachings often challenge us because they are part of Jesus' discipleship. In conflict, in troubles, and in dilemma, you are still in Christ and Christ in you. Every meal, every cup of tea, no matter how humble, they are still God's holy sacrament, through which to experience and taste Christ.

Friends in Christ, the reading from John's Gospel reminds us that Jesus is the bread of life. Just as physical bread sustains us, Jesus' presence in our lives gives us spiritual nourishment. Every day, every meal, and every moment is an opportunity to experience Christ's presence. Jesus lives in us and we live in him, no matter what. So, let's welcome him into our hearts and lives, and find strength and comfort in his presence, no matter the difficulties we face. Amen.

HYMN: You are holy TiS 753

You are holy, you are whole.
You are always ever more than we ever understand.
You are always at hand.
Blessed are you coming near;
blessed are you coming here
to your church in wine and bread,
raised from soil, raised from dead.

*You are holy, you are wholeness,
you are present, let the cosmos praise you, Lord!
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
hallelujah, hallelujah, our Lord!*

You are holy, you are whole.

You are always ever more than we ever understand.
You are always at hand.
Blessed are you coming near;
blessed are you coming here
to your church in wine and bread,
raised from soil, raised from dead.

*You are holy, you are wholeness,
you are present, let the cosmos praise you, Lord!
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
hallelujah, hallelujah, our Lord!*

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

Generous God,
we give thanks to you for the gift of life each day.
You are the bread of life,
sustaining and filling with goodness.
We bring these, our gifts, and our lives to you.
May they be used to feed others,
both physically and spiritually,
that the abundance of your love
maybe known in our world. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Loving and Gracious God,
we bring before you this day the pain, hurt and need of our world.
Often, we are left without words
and feel helpless in the face of such great suffering.
As we look around us we hear the groaning of creation.
Floods, fires, storms and strange weather patterns
tell of the needs of our earth.
Lands are cleared and species become extinct.
***Help us not to shy away from the difficult parts of life.
Hear our prayers this day
and prompt us where we might take action.***
As we look around us we hear the cries of your people.

Those who are homeless, oppressed, imprisoned
call out the injustices in our communities.

Children grow without love and the elderly die alone.

Help us not to shy away from the difficult parts of life.

Hear our prayers this day,

and prompt us where we might take action.

As we look around us we hear the sighing of our loved ones.

Sickness, hopelessness, tensions, and struggles
speak of the hunger of your children.

We live with grief, helplessness and despair.

Help us not to shy away from the difficult parts of life.

Hear our prayers this day

and prompt us where we might take action.

As we look around, we hear the yearning of your church.

Policies, projects, procedures and pressures
tell of the hopes of your people.

Congregations age and growth seems impossible.

Help us not to shy away from the difficult parts of life.

Hear our prayers this day,

and prompt us where we might take action. 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

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."

This is the Lord's table.

Our Saviour invites those who trust him

to share the feast which he has prepared.

COMMUNION HYMN: Come as you are TIS 693

“Come as you are: that’s how I want you.
Come as you are; feel quite at home,
close to my heart, loved and forgiven.
Come as you are: why stand alone?

“No need to fear, love sets no limits;
no need to fear, love never ends;
don’t run away shamed and disheartened,
rest in my love, trust me again.

“I came to call sinners, not just the righteous;
I came to bring peace, not to condemn.
Each time you fail to live by my promise,
why do you think I’d love you the less?

“Come as you are; that’s how I love you;
come as you are, trust me again.
Nothing can change the love that I bear you;
all will be well, just come as you are.”

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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.

It is indeed right, always and everywhere,
to give thanks to you, the true and living God.
Endless is your mercy and eternal is your reign.
All creation rejoices in your radiant splendour.
You made a covenant with your people
and declared your purpose of justice and love.
When all things were ready,

you sent your Son to be our Saviour.
In words and deeds he proclaimed your kingdom,
and obeyed your will even to death on the cross.
Through his mighty resurrection
he overcame sin and death to set the whole creation free.
Therefore with saints and angels and with all the choirs of heaven,
we join in the song of eternal praise:

***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 praise you, God,
that on the night in which he was betrayed
our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks,
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,
'Take and eat. This is my body, given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me'.

After supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying,
'This cup is the new covenant of my blood,
shed for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in remembrance of me'.

***As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

Therefore, gracious God,
with this bread and this cup
we remember that our Lord offered his life for us.
Believing the witness of his resurrection and ascension,
we look for his coming in glory,
and our sharing in his great and promised feast.
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit,
that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us the body and blood of Christ
and that we may live to your praise and glory

with all your saints in light.

Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.

Join our prayers and the prayers of all your people
on earth and in heaven with the intercessions of Christ,
our great high priest,

***through whom, with whom, and in whom,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all worship and honour are yours,
almighty God,
for ever and ever. 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.***

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 for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ,
whom we have received in this Holy Communion.

We are grateful for the grace and strength you have provided
through this sacred meal.

As we leave this place,
may the presence of Christ continue to nourish our souls and guide our lives.
Help us to live out the love and peace we have experienced here.
Empower us to serve you and one another with renewed faith and commitment.
May our hearts be transformed by your love and our actions reflect your mercy.
Amen.

The Sending Forth of the People of God
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HYMN: The Lord is my shepherd TiS 659

The Lord is my shepherd, and I want to follow
wherever he leads me, wherever he goes.
Over the mountains, the waters and by-ways,
valleys and highways he's waiting for me.

*I want to go to meet him there,
to lay myself down in his love.
The Lord is my shepherd and I want to follow
wherever he leads me, wherever he goes.*

And while on the journey to where we are going
he promised to be there to help us along,
and over the mountains we'll walk on together,
to know all the wonders he's given to me.

*I want to go to meet him there,
to lay myself down in his love.
The Lord is my shepherd and I want to follow
wherever he leads me, wherever he goes.*

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BLESSING

Bread of life,
we have been fed by your word,
filled with your Spirit,
and encouraged by each other's presence.
As we leave this place
to return to the world where people hunger,
let us take the manna of your abundant love to share.

Give us eyes to see those who are hungry,
ears to hear their stories,
hands to give, receive and hold
and hearts to love without judgment.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you, and remain with you always. Amen.

SENDING SONG: A Christmas Blessing (May the feet of God) TiS 779

May the feet of God walk with you,
and God's hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and God's ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and God's breath give you life.
May the child of God grow in you,
and God's love bring you home.

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