

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
SUNDAY, August 24 at 10.00 AM
Pentecost 11
Call and Response

WELCOME

Our theme for today is "Call and Response". Our readings from the Hebrew scriptures is from the first chapter of the book of the prophet Jeremiah, and tells of God's knowledge of Jeremiah, God's call him, and Jeremiah's response to God. We will think about what it means for God to know us and our context, to call us, and our response to God.

LIGHT THE CANDLE / AFFIRMATIONS

God is here **God is always here**
God is with us **God is always with us**

MISSION 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Bidjegal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners of this land. We pay our respects to their elders past and present. We commit to work for a more just settlement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

OPENING PRAYER

Creator-of-all,
it is a mystery to us
how you weave all life together,
holding all in your hands,
nurturing each element of the universe from dust.
And as you mother all things into life,
you accompany us, even here, even now.
We ask that you would be among us,
set your Spirit upon us, your people here at Kogarah UC.
Call us again to live with Christ's love.

Amen!

SING – Companions on the journey – Seasons 8-8

*We are companions on the journey,
breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God.*

No longer strangers to each other,
no longer strangers in God's house;
we are fed and we are nourished
by the strength of those who care,
by the strength of those who care.

*We are companions on the journey,
breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God.*

We have been gifted with each other,
and we are called by the Word of the Lord:
to act with justice, to love tenderly,
and to walk humbly with our God,
to walk humbly with our God.

*We are companions on the journey,
breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God. (Repeat)*

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CALL TO WORSHIP

From my first to my last:

O God, you are my rock.

From beginning to end:

O God, you nurture the world.

Be present with us in this time and this place.

We worship you, O God.

CONFESSION

The writer of Psalm 71:1–6 declares that God is like a place of safety and rest.

Let us then confess our trust in God together:

In you, Loving God, I take refuge;

let me never be put to shame.

In your righteousness free me and rescue me;

turn your ear to me and save me.

Be to me a place of safety and security,

a strong fortress, to protect me,

for you are my rock and my fortress.

For you, O God, are my hope,

my trust, O God, from my youngest days.

Amen!

SING – Borning cry – All together 320

I was there to hear your borning cry,

I'll be there when you are old.

I rejoiced the day you were baptised to see your life unfold.

I was there when you were but a child

with a faith to suit you well;

in a blaze of light you wandered off to find where demons dwell.

When you heard the wonder of the Word
I was there to cheer you on.
You were raised to praise the living Lord to whom you now belong.
If you find someone to share your time,
and you join your hearts as one,
I'll be there to make your verses rhyme from dusk til rising sun.

In the middle ages of your life,
not too old, no longer young,
I'll be there to guide you through the night,
complete what I've begun.
When the evening gently closes in
and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been with just one more surprise.

I was there to hear your bawling cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptised
to see your life unfold.

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Words of affirmation

The psalmist speaks of God's presence, nurturing, teaching, and accompanying, even from our earliest days. Hear these words of comfort and grace:
The Creator has not left us.
Christ is among us.
God's Spirit in the midst of the world.

Thanks be to God! Amen!

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you...

READING FROM THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Jeremiah 1 : 4-10

⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ⁵"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." ⁶Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." ⁷But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." ⁹Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

SING – O God you search me – Seasons 7-28

O God, you search me and you know me.
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down, you are before me:
ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting you besiege me:
in ev'ry moment of life or death, you are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
you have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future, too.

Although your Spirit is upon me,
still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

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READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

Luke 13 : 10 - 17

¹⁰Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." ¹⁵But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

REFLECTION

A Reflection by Bruce Prewer on Luke 13: 10-17

When Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, there was a woman who had been afflicted for 18 years with a curved spine; bent over so that she could not straighten up at all.

Jesus noticed her, called her and said: "Dear woman, you are now liberated from your affliction."

He laid his hands upon her and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

But the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus had dare to heal on the Sabbath day. He said: "There are six days on which all work should be done. Come of those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath day."

Doing the right thing will not always bring you kudos.

But that is the way Jesus went. The right thing was the most loving thing, and the most loving thing would prove to be the most dangerous thing.

Luke sets the story of a handicapped woman in the context of Jesus resolutely making his way towards Jerusalem. He is on his way to a fateful confrontation that will end with his execution.

It would be tempting for Jesus to go softly at this stage, to not upset his angry critics. But as always with Jesus, the call on his compassion overrode everything else. Here in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, was a woman with extreme curvature of the spine; bent towards the ground, unable to look directly into the eyes of anyone except maybe, the eyes of little children.

A JEWISH VERSION OF KARMA

You have seen such unfortunate people. You have looked on them as Jesus did. But you most likely do not share the harsh attitude which was common in Jesus time: Such affliction was thought to be the result of sin; either hers or her parents. She had it coming to her. It was divine judgement. A Jewish version of the Indian "karma."

Stuck fast in the minds of many was the notion that God always rewards the good and punishes the wicked in obvious ways. If misfortune comes to you, it is your own fault. If you are repentant the punishment will stop. If you stay unrepentant the punishment remains.

It was this same doctrine against which the Old Testament book of Job rebels.

In his day, good health and prosperity were seen as the valid reward for righteousness; poverty and suffering were the punishment for evil.

Job fiercely contested this view of things. This way of thinking also accounts for the bewilderment in some of the heart-rending cries that we read in the Psalms, where good people lament their condition.

By this version of karma, victims of disaster were made victims twice over: They bore the affliction plus the distaste and scorn of those who were living comfortable lives.

It has echoes in those who blame the unemployed for being unemployed, or the deserted spouse for being deserted, or the refugee for being refugee.

It was (and in some quarters still is) a cruel doctrine.

STRIKE ONE

Jesus, the person of supreme compassion, at every opportunity challenged this way of thinking and acting. As he does in the synagogue on this occasion.

He refers to the woman not as a sinner but as a daughter of Abraham; which means a faithful Jew.

He sees the affliction not as a judgement of God but as an evil: *"this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years."* Daughter of Abraham? Affirmation for a Jew does not get much better than that.

These words and actions are enough to annoy the Head Man of the synagogue. He is typical of those for whom rules are more important than love. It also offended some of the other pious men who were present and watching his every move, so that they could report it to headquarters in Jerusalem.

In their judgement, his attitude was dangerous. It was a case of strike one.

STRIKE TWO

But wait, there is second offence. The healing deed was done on the Sabbath day.

Work, even the most simple task, was forbidden on the Sabbath. As little as lighting a lamp or a fire, or cooking a meal, was seen as forbidden work. Lawyers could not deal with clients, doctors could not treat patients on the Sabbath. By their understanding, Jesus was certainly breaking the Sabbath when he healed the handicapped woman.

There are six days on which work should be done. Come for healing on those days, not on the Sabbath.

Jesus must have expected this reaction. He knew what he was doing. He knew his critics were following him. I suppose he could have been discreet and asked the woman to see him privately after church, or maybe in that evening after sunset, when the Sabbath would have expired.

But Jesus? No way. He cared too much to be silent. As far as he was concerned, this woman had already suffered too long. Now was the time for compassion. Now was the opportune moment. Now was the hour of liberation.

He knew that one more strike and he would be out. Yet none of the retribution that would befall him mattered as much as this person's immediate need. If it meant one more nail ready for the cross, so be it. Love came first, now.

His critics were ready: *There are six days on which work should be done. Come for healing on those days, not on the Sabbath.*

There is frustration and anger in Jesus' retort: *You hypocrites! Each of you on the Sabbath will untie his ox or his ass and lead it to the water. Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, who has been bound by Satan for eighteen years, be loosed from her bondage on this Sabbath day?*

These words arise out of burning love. There are appropriate occasions for such anger. The New Testament tells us to be *angry and sin not*. Jesus managed it. With Jesus, anger and compassion came from the same source; love.

We are not so good at picking the right situation or the right moment for anger. Our anger is not always the flipside of compassion.

Of course, such burning love proves costly. This good anger of Christ was like ordering a couple more nails for his own cross; but for Jesus one suffering woman was worth it.

THE COMMON PEOPLE WERE THRILLED

We read: *By saying this, his critics were publicly shamed; but all the common people were thrilled with the wonderful things Jesus had done.*

The impressed people, those who became excited, were the ordinary folk; those whom the righteous men of Jerusalem despised as *the people of the land*.

It is significant that the despised people recognise the hand of God at work.
Their despisers, the godfearing men, do not. It is rather like what is predicted in Mary's song of joy, the "Magnificat":
*those who are hungry are satisfied with good things;
the rich go empty away.*

Do you ever feel bit uneasy wondering whether this is still the case today? Do the common people recognise the hand of God where the more sophisticated among us only see something that might threaten or annoy us?

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Now let's focus on ourselves for a couple of minutes.

Here we are in church, our version of the synagogue.

Here with us is, by his Spirit, Christ Jesus, unseen but intimately present as he promised.

Now is the opportune moment when he wants to share his compassion.

He calls to us. Do we come forward to him?

Now his compassion flows.

Now his hands want to rest on you. But you must, in your mind and heart, come forward to him.

God does grant us opportune moments.

As you try to picture Jesus dealing with this unfortunate woman, what is his posture?

I'll tell you my vision of him: As the woman timidly comes forward, I picture him bending, looking up into her eyes, and reaching his hand up to her.

You see, he comes not as an overpowering authority from above, but as one of us, looking into our eyes.

His hand does not come down with a patronising gesture from above, but it moves towards us on our level. It rests gently but firmly on us, at the very spot where we most need loving. But only if you wish it.

Listen – Called together – Worship Pack #1 - listen

OFFERING

Gracious God, we give you thanks for life, for your presence, for the gifts that we receive. May these gifts be used to build a world of justice, compassion, and grace.

Amen!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

God, who spoke to Jeremiah

as his community felt threatened and

as his community needed to be challenged about their assumed way of living,
speak also to us and be at work within the world.

Creator God,

give us eyes

to see what is unjust,

give us mouths

to call injustice,

give us hands

to build something new.

We pray for people and places who experience violence.

(You might name some of these places in the world. They might include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine, Sudan, Ukraine, West Papua...)

Creator God,

give us eyes

to see what is unjust,

give us mouths

to call injustice,

give us hands

to build something new.

We know that violence is also among us, sometimes hidden as racism, sexism, and embedded assumptions that some people are not worthy.

Creator God,

give us eyes

to see what is unjust,

give us mouths

to call injustice,

give us hands

to build something new.

We know that we are not all positioned the same way in relation to power and to violence. Even within our community gathered here, some of us carry greater privilege than others.

Creator God,

give us eyes

to see what is unjust,

give us mouths

to call injustice,

give us hands

to build something new.

Teach us to live as Jesus lived: with anger for injustice, with compassion for the marginalised. Jesus created new communities across boundaries and differences. Put his Spirit of Love within our community so that we might follow after Christ.

Creator God,

give us eyes

to see what is unjust,

give us mouths

to call injustice,

give us hands

to build something new.

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today your daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours, now and forever. Amen

BLESSING AND SENDING

God called Jeremiah!

God also calls us:

to follow after Christ

to live with compassion,

to call out injustice

to build communities of love,

with God's Spirit as our companion.

Go in peace to love and serve God.

In the name of Christ, Amen!

SING – May you find peace – Seasons 7-26

May you find peace,

may you find hope,

may you find joy this day.

May you find love,

may you find rest

here in this place together.

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