

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
10.00 am 22/3/26

GREETING

CALL TO WORSHIP

In this time of worship, we wait for you, O God.

Yes, we wait for you.

We feel out of our depth in troubles,

and we wonder if you hear our cries for mercy.

If we list what is wrong in our lives, we are overwhelmed.

So, we trust in your mercy as we come to worship.

We wait for you eagerly,

and trust in your promises.

Holy One, breathe new life in us

as we continue on this Lenten journey.

Help us to follow in the way of Jesus,

who brings hope and new beginnings.

Amen

LIGHT THE CHRIST CANDLE and God is here.....God is with us

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

As we gather together in this time and place,

we acknowledge the Bidjegal people of the Eora nation,

who have walked, lived, and told stories on this land for thousands of years.

We honour their Elders, past and present,

and their deep listening to Country.

As Lent invites us to bring our whole selves before God—

with our loss, longing, and fragile hope—

may we commit to truthful listening and renewed relationship with First Peoples.

SAYING WHO WE ARE

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 community and sharing the journey of life and faith.

SING Come Down O Love Divine TIS/398

Come down, O Love divine,

seek now this soul of mine,

and visit it with your own ardour glowing;

O comforter, draw near,

within my heart appear

and kindle it, your holy flame bestowing.

There let it freely burn,

till earthly passions turn

to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming;

and let your glorious light

shine ever on my sight

and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity
my outer garment be,
and lowliness become my inner clothing:
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part
and for its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong
with which the soul will long
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace
till we become the place
in which the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, thank you for keeping us company on our Lenten journey.
The Apostle Paul writes that “to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” We confess, O God, that when we, as your people in this place, set our minds on the things of the flesh as opposed to the Spirit, our lives become all too easily influenced by and attracted to the powers of the world.

Forgive us when our vision is limited by the power of the ‘bottom line’
- whether we can afford to make plans for the future or not.

Remind us that all things are possible when our minds are set on the Spirit.

Forgive us if we remain captive to patterns and programmes of the past.

Remind us that newness and future possibilities can become reality when our minds are set on the Spirit.

Forgive us when daily news reports and personal experiences fill us with fear
and depression, hopelessness and despair.

Remind us that when minds are set on the Spirit, you give us the ability to cope because your Spirit, O God, brings life into the most deadening situations.

Forgive us when our words and actions conceal the truth of the gospel.

Remind us that our integrity is alive and well when our minds are set on the Spirit.

A time of silence

Gracious life-giving God, set our minds, our hearts, and our lives anew on the Holy Spirit so that we are filled with your life and love, mercy and peace. May all our relationships be so bound together with these qualities that we are visible reminders that your Spirit, O God dwells in us all. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

PSALM 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Our hope is in God whose steadfast love surrounds us and in whom “is great power to redeem”. This power is revealed in Jesus Christ who promises us life where there is death, and forgiveness where there is sin.

The good news therefore is this: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

PEACE

SING The Great Love of God TIS/164

The great love of God
is revealed in the Son,
who came to this earth
to redeem every one.

That love, like a stream
flowing clear to the sea,
makes clean every heart
that from sin would be free.

It binds the whole world,
every barrier it breaks,
the hills it lays low,
and the mountains it shakes.

It's yours, it is ours,
O how lavishly giv'n!
the pearl of great price,
and the treasure of heav'n.

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HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.” ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there

was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹²Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

SILENT LISTENING

SING – Listen in the silence – Seasons 8-22 – sing 3 times

Listen in the silence,

listen in the noise,

listen for the sound of the Spirit's voice.

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NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹²The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." ²⁸When she

had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."³⁵ Jesus began to weep.³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

REFLECTION

Ezekiel 37:1–14, John 11:1–45

Good morning, everyone. Welcome again to our worship. It is a blessing to be with you on this fifth Sunday of Lent. As we walk closer to Easter, we must look honestly at the world around us. Sometimes, it feels like the whole world is a "Valley of Dry Bones", like the story in our Old Testament reading. Think about the news we see every day. The conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran is creating a dark shadow over many nations. In Gaza, the sound of explosions is constant. But it is not just there. In Iran and across the Middle East, so many innocent people—the children, the elderly, and the weak—are suffering and losing their lives. The sound of bombs never stops. We see pictures that break our hearts: mothers covered in grey dust, crying toward heaven while holding their children who have passed away. In the streets of Gaza and the cities of Iran, we see the faces of little ones who have lost their parents, their schools, and their future. Their screams are a modern-day "Valley of Bones." War has taken away their homes, their peace, and their smiles.

As I was praying for this world, I came across a heartbreaking story that happened about 14 months ago. It is a story about young soldiers from North Korea who were sent to the war between Russia and Ukraine. These young men were lied to. They were told they were going to learn new things and see the modern world. But when they arrived, they didn't find a school; they found a bloody battlefield. The orders they received were cruel: "Fight until you die. If you are about to be captured, blow yourself up. If you survive as a prisoner, your family back home—your parents and your children—will all be punished or killed." It has been over a year since two of these North Korean soldiers were injured and captured in Ukraine. As I read about their situation again recently, my heart was deeply pained. For 14 months, they have been trapped in a terrible choice. If they go back, they face death.

If they stay or defect, their families back home are in danger. They are truly "living dry bones"—trapped in a valley of shadows for a long time, with no easy way out.

And what about our own lives? Look around our community. Many people among us feel like dry bones because of the heavy weight of life—broken families, the pain of sickness, or the lonely struggle to survive. This 'dryness' in our hearts grows even deeper when we look at our future. When we look ahead, we often feel worried rather than hopeful. Technology, AI, and robots are developing so fast that we fear a future where machines might rule the world and replace human hearts. In this high-tech world, we worry that our jobs, our decisions, and even our relationships will be controlled by computers. Sometimes, we feel like we are becoming just 'dry bones' in a world of cold metal and code. This fear of the future can make our souls feel empty and dry, as if we are losing what it means to be human. Whether it is the pain of war, the struggle of our neighbours, or the fear of a machine-dominated future—we all have our own valleys. Maybe today, you feel like those soldiers or like a soul lost in a digital world, wondering if there is any hope left for you.

In Ezekiel 37, God takes the prophet to a valley full of bones. They were "very dry." This means all hope was gone. But look at what God does. God didn't look at the bones from a distance. He walked through the bones with Ezekiel. Our God is the God who enters the dust. He is in the ruins of the Middle East. He is in the lonely hearts of those North Korean soldiers who have been suffering for 14 months. He is in your heart when you feel anxious about the future and the painful realities of life. God doesn't just watch our pain from heaven; he enters our reality. God asks Ezekiel: "Can these bones live?" Human eyes say "No." But Ezekiel says, "Lord, you alone know." This is a prayer of trust. Then, God tells Ezekiel to speak. When he speaks God's word, there is a rattling sound! Bones start clicking together. And when God breathed his Spirit into them, they stood up as a 'vast army.' This is the promise: Only God can give true life. It is he who prepares the breath that fills the dry bones!

In the Gospel of John, we see Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead for four days. It was a hopeless situation. But then, the Bible gives us the shortest and most powerful sentence: "Jesus wept." Why did Jesus cry? He cried because He felt the pain of Mary and Martha. His tears tell us that God is not a robot. He has a heart that breaks when our hearts break. At our Uniting Church, we care deeply about Social Justice. Why? Because justice starts with the tears of Jesus. We see the long-standing pain and the broken history of the First Nations peoples of this land, and we hear the cries of those trapped by war or lost in this cold world. We do not just stand there. We act because Jesus' heart is breaking for them. Jesus said to the people: "Take away the stone." Jesus could have moved the stone with a miracle, but he asked the people to do it. This is our job. God gives the life, but he asks us to move the stones of injustice. When we pray for peace, when we help a refugee, or when we hold a neighbour's hand, we are "moving the stone" together.

Finally, Jesus shouted with a loud voice: 'Lazarus, come out!' And just like that, Lazarus walked out, and Jesus said, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' This is God's command to the world today. To the mothers in war zones, to the soldiers in fear, and to each of you here: 'Come out of the grave! Throw away your burial clothes!' Jesus wants to unbind you today. He wants to take away the 'burial clothes' of your past mistakes, your worries about the future.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, Lent is a journey toward life. Even in a world filled with the shadows of war, the pain of our daily struggles, and deep anxiety about an uncertain future, God is breathing new life into us. This week, let us embrace this beautiful truth: God is breathing his Spirit into the very heart of our pain and struggles. Because we have received this life, let us go out and be a 'breath of life' for someone else. Speak a word of hope to the weary. Show genuine kindness to the lonely. Move a stone for someone who is stuck in their own darkness. The tomb is open, and God's breath is blowing. Let us rise and live together in his hope.

Amen.

SING The Life of Jesus Shows a Way Tune TIS/375

The life of Jesus shows a way
of living life in love each day.
He lived with kindness, but was strong
in striking out against all wrong.
We seek to live in harmony,
but try to counter tyranny.

The life of Jesus is a cry
to share our wealth and modify
desires for the most and best;
with what we have, we're surely blest!
We seek to live in harmony,
and turn our backs on luxury.

The life of Jesus is a voice,
when doubt engulfs us, to rejoice
in beauty of the world around,
compassion which is so profound.
We seek to live in harmony;
make joy a shared reality .

The life of Jesus is a plea -
"Forgive and love your enemy."
We must not learn to use the sword;
and making guns must be outlawed.
We seek to live in harmony;
to stop all senseless agony.

In Jesus Christ, God's call to life
is lived amidst horrific strife;
God, as the source of love, is known
in Jesus Christ, though not alone;
we also seek our destiny
To let love have supremacy.

George Stuart; Singing a new song 30.
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OFFERTORY PRAYER

God of peace, it is our deep desire that people everywhere find life and peace. Use the gifts we bring today so that life and peace come closer to those most in need, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Waiting is hard.

We do not wait alone.

Wait with us, Holy One,
for renewal in the world;

**thank you that we do not wait alone—
that you choose not to act alone.**

Show us how our presence,
our love, care, actions,
may join with your renewing love,
bringing new life into the world.

Spirit of life and peace, we think of places across the world where there is war...
Come, Spirit of Christ, **bring life and peace.**

Spirit of life and peace, we bring to mind people facing sickness and disease...
Short silence

Come, Spirit of Christ, **bring life and peace.**

Spirit of life and peace, we remember communities recovering from natural disasters...
Short silence

Come, Spirit of Christ, **bring life and peace.**

Spirit of life and peace, we pray for homes where there is violence and oppression and hope is hard to find...

Short silence

Come, Spirit of Christ, **bring life and peace.**

Spirit of life and peace, in silence we bring to you the people and concerns closest to our hearts this morning...

Short silence

Come Spirit of Christ, **bring life and peace, Amen.**

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Come, all you who thirst,
all you who hunger for the bread of life,
all you whose souls cry out for healing;
Come, come to the feast of life.

The Table of Jesus is our place of gathering;

here we are welcomed, wanted, loved,
here there is a place set for us;
Let us come to the feast of life.

COMMUNION HYMN:

SING **This is a day of New Beginnings** **TIS/653**

This is a day of new beginnings,
time to remember, and move on,
time to believe what love is bringing,
laying to rest the pain that's gone.

For by the life and death of Jesus,
God's mighty Spirit, now as then,
can make for us a world of difference
as faith and hope are born again.

Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,
step from the past, and leave behind
our disappointment, guilt and grieving,
seeking new paths, and sure to find.

Christ is alive, and goes before us
to show and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
our God is making all things new.

In faith we'll gather round the table
to taste and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
our God is making all things new.

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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.

Thanks and praise, glory and honour are rightly yours,
our Lord and God, for you alone are worthy.
In time beyond our dreaming, you brought forth life out of darkness,
and in the love of Christ your Son
you set man and woman at the heart of your creation.
For this we praise you with the faithful of every time
and place joining with the whole creation

in the eternal hymn:

*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 thank you that you called a covenant people to be a light to the nations.
Through Moses you taught us to love your law,
and in the prophets you cried out for justice.
In the fullness of your mercy you became one with us in Jesus Christ,
who gave himself up for us on the cross.
You make us alive together with him,
that we may rejoice in his presence and share his peace.

*By water and the Spirit
you open the kingdom to all who believe,
and welcome us to your table:
for by grace we are saved, through faith.*

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.”
With this bread and this cup
we do as our Saviour commands:
we celebrate the redemption he has won for us.

*Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.*

Pour out the Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine,
that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.
Make us one with him, one with each other,
and one in ministry in the world,
until at last we feast with him in the kingdom.
Through your Son, Jesus Christ, in your holy church,
all honour and glory are yours, Father almighty, 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

Gracious God,

thank you for this holy meal and for your love.

As we leave this table, fill us with your Spirit.

Help us to share your hope with the weary

and to show kindness to those who are hurting.

*Remind us to walk together in peace and reconciliation
with all people in our community.*

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

BLESSING

As we go from here,
may our vision be on God,
our attending be for God's Word,
our patience matched by action,
participating in life made new.
May the Ever-Present One
hold us in patience and peace,
a blessing to hold and keep us
until we meet again.
Amen.

SENDING OUT SONG The Lord of the Dance TIS/242

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,
at Bethlehem I had my birth:
Dance then, wherever you may be;
"I am the Lord of the dance," said he;
"and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance," said he.

I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,
but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John,
they came with me and the dance went on:

Dance then, wherever you may be;
“I am the Lord of the dance,” said he;
“and I’ll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I’ll lead you all in the dance,” said he.

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:
the holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,
and they left me there on a cross to die:
Dance then, wherever you may be;
“I am the Lord of the dance,” said he;
“and I’ll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I’ll lead you all in the dance,” said he.

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
it’s hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I’d gone;
but I am the dance and I still go on:
Dance then, wherever you may be;
“I am the Lord of the dance,” said he;
“and I’ll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I’ll lead you all in the dance,” said he.

They cut me down and I leap up high,
I am the life that will never, never die;
I’ll live in you if you’ll live in me:
“I am the Lord of the Dance,” said he:
Dance then, wherever you may be;
“I am the Lord of the dance,” said he;
“and I’ll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I’ll lead you all in the dance,” said he.

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