

## Repairers of the Breach, Bearers of the Light

### *A Sermon for the Dedication of Ormond Uniting Church* Isaiah 58:1–12 | Matthew 5:13–20

#### Pre-Sermon Introduction

Friends in Christ,  
before we turn to the sermon, may I first say how grateful I am to be here with you today.

Thank you for the invitation to share in this significant moment in the life of Ormond Uniting Church. It is a real joy to be present as you dedicate this building and give thanks for the long journey that has brought you to this day.

I want especially to acknowledge your minister, **Rev Dr Ji Zhang**, and to honour the faithfulness of his leadership among you. Ji, we also acknowledge your family — your wife and your two sons — and the way ministry is never carried by one person alone, but is always held by those who walk alongside in love and support.

I acknowledge **Dr Mardie Townsend**, Chair of your Church Council;  
**David Higham**, Chair of the Port Phillip East Presbytery;  
and all who serve in leadership across the life of the Church.

I also want to acknowledge someone very special among us today — **Rev Bill Morgan**, who at 110 years of age reminds us what a lifetime of faithful ministry looks like. He once said words that feel especially fitting for today:

*“Faith is not static. It grows out of experience — and faith inspires you to go on.”<sup>1</sup>*

Bill, we thank God for your life, your witness, and your faithfulness, and we are deeply honoured to have you with us.

I also warmly welcome those joining us from civic and community life — including representatives of local government, project partners, and all who have shared in this rebuilding journey in different ways.

And to each of you who have gathered today — members, neighbours, friends, and guests — thank you for being here. Your presence matters.

We stand on Bunurong Country, having been welcomed through smoke and story, reminded that this land has been held in care long before this building stood, wisdom was already crying out in the streets, and God was already present in this place.

As we turn now to God’s Word, let us pause — and pray.

#### PRAYER

Gracious God, be present with us now.

Open our hearts to your Word and shape us by your Spirit,  
that we may live as repairers of the breach and bearers of your light,  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Marina Williams, “God’s servant fits the Bill” (Uniting Church Vic/Tas)

## Sermon Introduction

Today we gather to dedicate a building —  
a building shaped by time, prayer, and perseverance.

This place carries the footsteps of many who have come before us.  
Generations who have worshipped here, served here, disagreed and reconciled here,  
laughed here, grieved here, and kept showing up — often quietly, often faithfully. Ministers  
and elders, volunteers and neighbours, children and young people, migrants and long-  
standing members — some whose names are remembered, and many whose names are  
not, yet whose faith and labour are woven into the life of this congregation.

This building has held change.  
It has witnessed seasons of growth and seasons of waiting.  
It has been shaped not only by architects and builders, but by people who refused to let the  
story of this congregation end.

Seventeen years of rebuilding is not simply a project completed.  
It is a testimony to patience, courage, and shared hope — a reminder that the Church is  
never made by bricks alone, but by people who trust God across time.

And so today, as we dedicate this building anew, we are not simply marking an ending.  
We are naming a calling — one that stretches back through the lives of those who have  
served here, and forward into the lives of those yet to come.

## Isaiah 58: A Prophetic Word for a Rebuilding People

The reading from Isaiah this morning is not an easy word —  
but it is an honest one.

Isaiah speaks to a community that is deeply religious.  
They worship.  
They fast.  
They pray and seek God.

And they are confused — because they believe they are being faithful, yet God seems  
distant.

So, the prophet speaks plainly on God's behalf.

God says: *the issue is not that you are worshipping — the issue is that your worship has  
stopped shaping how you live together.*

The words “*Day after day they seek me*” are not praise.  
They are a mirror<sup>2</sup> being held up.

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<sup>2</sup> John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*

The people are sincere, but faith has become disconnected from responsibility.<sup>3</sup> Worship continues, while some remain burdened. Prayer is offered, while injustice goes unchallenged. Devotion is visible, but the shared life of the community remains fractured.

Isaiah names a truth every generation of the Church must hear: faith can be very active and still miss the heart of God.

God is not rejecting prayer or fasting.  
God is calling worship back into alignment with life.<sup>4</sup>

The fast God chooses is one that loosens injustice, lifts heavy burdens, feeds the hungry, welcomes the displaced, and refuses to turn away from one another.

Only then does the prophet move from critique to calling.

And he names it like this:

**“You shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.” (Isaiah 58:12)**

That is not a compliment.  
It is a vocation.

A breach is what happens when trust is stretched thin,  
when relationships fray,  
when communities grow weary.

To be called *repairers of the breach* is not to be told we are perfect.  
It is to be invited into responsibility.

And on a day like today, as we dedicate this church, that invitation matters.

Because dedicating a building is not about saying, “*We’ve arrived.*”  
It is about saying, “*We are willing — again — to do the work God calls us to do.*”

## **Weaving Christ’s Love**

This is why my theme as President of the Uniting Church is “**Weaving Christ’s love across cultures and boundaries.**”

Because repair is never abstract.  
It is woven — patiently and together.

Weaving assumes difference — different histories, cultures, languages, and generations. And it also requires unweaving: unweaving habits that exclude, assumptions that centre only one story, and patterns that place the burden on a few while protecting the comfort of others.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 58:1–12 (NRSV).

<sup>4</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*

Isaiah reminds us that **light rises when we stay close to need** — when we attend to those who are weighed down and refuse to turn away from one another, especially those who are tired, overlooked, or carrying more than their share (*Isaiah 58*).

This is not easy work.

It takes humility and courage.

It means choosing relationship over comfort — **staying present across difference rather than pulling back when faith asks more of us than ease or familiarity.**

Only then can Christ's love be woven again — as a strong tapestry of unity, compassion, and hope.

This congregation already knows something of that work through its long journey of rebuilding and its intercultural life.

To be repairers of the breach is to be weavers of Christ's love — across cultures, across generations, and across the places where the fabric of community has been stretched thin.

### **From Repair to Light: Jesus and the Life of the World**

Isaiah does not end with warning.

He ends with promise.

When justice is practised, when burdens are lifted, when repair begins, Isaiah says that **light breaks forth like the dawn.**

Light, in Scripture, is never something we manufacture.

It is something God brings forth when life is made right again.

And this is where Jesus picks up the story.

When Jesus says to his disciples, "*You are the light of the world,*" he is not changing the subject. He is completing it.

The streets Isaiah imagines being restored are the same streets Jesus imagines being lit — places where people can live openly, safely, and with hope.

Jesus speaks these words at the very beginning of his ministry — not to the powerful or the religious elite, but to ordinary people learning what it means to follow him. He tells them that their life together will be visible, not for their own glory, but so that God's goodness might be known.

When Jesus speaks of a city on a hill or a lamp on a stand, he is not calling the Church to perfection or prominence. He is calling the Church to integrity — a life that can be seen because it is shaped by love.<sup>5</sup>

And at the centre of this calling stands Christ himself.

Jesus is not only the one who speaks about light — he is the one who enters the deepest breach.

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<sup>5</sup> Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*

In his life, he walks among the burdened.  
In his ministry, he restores the excluded.  
In his death, he bears the weight of a broken world.  
And in his resurrection, God declares that love, not injustice, has the final word.

The Church does not generate this light.  
The Church bears it — by remaining close to Christ.<sup>6</sup>

## What We Dedicate Today

So what are we dedicating today?

Not simply walls and doors,  
but a **public witness**.<sup>7</sup>

This building is not an endpoint.  
It is a base for mission.

A place where prayer forms courage.  
Where worship shapes compassion.  
Where Christ's love is woven into the everyday life of this community.

To dedicate this church is to say:

- we choose repair over retreat,
- faithfulness over appearance,
- love over comfort.

And God's promise remains:

*"The Lord will guide you continually...  
you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water whose waters never fail."*

Not because the work is easy —  
but because God is faithful.

## A Sending Word

Friends, the future of the Church will not be secured by buildings alone.  
It will be shaped by communities willing to live their faith visibly, humbly, and courageously.

Today, God names you again.

Repairers of the breach.  
Bearers of the light.  
Weavers of Christ's love.

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<sup>6</sup> Rowan Williams, *Being Christian*

<sup>7</sup> Leslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

May this place always echo with prayer —  
and may its doors always open toward the world God so loves.

Amen.

*This sermon draws on contemporary biblical scholarship in prophetic ethics, ecclesiology, and the theology of public witness.*

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