

**St. Margaret's Uniting Church  
Mooroolbark**

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June, 2018  
Third Sunday after Pentecost**

**Welcome**

**All are invited to share morning tea following the service**

**WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD:**

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE WURUNDJERI PEOPLE

GREETING & INTRODUCTION

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all ... **and also with you.**

WE SING 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise' (TIS 143)

CALL TO WORSHIP

OPENING PRAYER

**WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD:**

READING 1 Samuel 8:4-20 *Israel seeks a king*

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, 'You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.' But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to govern us.' Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so

also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.'

So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.'

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, 'No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.'

## SHARING THE EARLY WORD

WE SING 'Hey king'

GOSPEL READING Mark 3:20-35 *The True Kindred of Jesus*

... and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided

against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'— for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

For the word of the Lord ... **thanks be to God.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

In the name of Christ, you are restored again,  
**Thanks be to God! Amen.**

## REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

Friends, be careful what you pray for, and more careful about what you desire.

In both our readings there is conflict driven by human desire that is at odds with the way of God. Both stories speak into our vulnerabilities and the restless ache for peace and comfort in a world that is scarce of these offerings.

In 1 Samuel, the people want a king. Up until this time JHWH (Jehovah) has been acting as king to the people. But God is hard to see, or hear, or understand. And when we feel less than assured within ourselves, it is a recipe for disaster. The people demand a solution from Samuel, who finds himself in the awkward position as mouthpiece or interpreter between God and the unhappy masses.

The masses see that their neighbours, other nations, all seem to have a king to guide them and fight their battles. Wonderful, they proclaim – this will solve all our problems. A God known through thunder or clouds or annoying prophets seems unable to do what is needed to lead a sovereign people. Only a king can do that.

But Samuel has some sage advice in return. Be careful what you pray for, and more careful what you desire. If you have a king, that king will feed off your hard work. He will fleece you of ten percent of your wealth and capacity to make ends meet. It is a high cost, especially when you already have the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of slavery, into a land of promise.

What is it that drives such restlessness? Perhaps a good psychologist or sociologist might have some answers. But whatever the ill, it continues to happen today. Think of world leaders today and the way they wield power and might for their own ends, not for the sake of their people. If we think they are there to fight our battles, rather than look after themselves, we will often be disappointed. And yet we are drawn to cast our lot with them. Why would we put our faith in those who send nations to war, or those who bully others with economic sanctions or turn away those most vulnerable at our borders when the justice of God holds promise for the whole of creation?

The people demand a king, and so it comes to pass. King Saul is anointed and the prophecy is fulfilled as the king fleeces the people in ways that God's justice would never have allowed. Be careful what you pray for.

And if the world of politics, kings and queens has little resonance for you, the story of Jesus and his family is also reminder of how we can get in the way of who we are meant to be.

From the gospel of Mark, we find Jesus has returned to his home town. It is not always easy to do such a thing, as people remember who we were at school; and our families try to keep things in order and demand we comply to keep status quo.

So, Jesus finds himself in his hometown and he is speaking and teaching the people as he does wherever he goes. And in the story, we hear that those gathered and listening are seated – in other words there is order to what is going on. But there is stirring on the edges. On the outer we find family coming to find Jesus. They stand and stir against all else happening. They demand that Jesus come home, that he go inside, that he stop being teacher and fall into line with family expectations.

It is easy to fall into our own stories like this. I am the last born in my family, and to my mother I was always her little boy. And when she finally found her rest earlier this year, there was unrest among the siblings as we tried to establish our order without living parents. There were mini-tussles based on birth order; and there were some based on life experience and then on skills learned in different places. The week between Mum dying and her funeral was tough for all seven of us, although we did manage to find our way in the end.

Jesus' mother and brothers demand he come home. Fall into line – “Sonny, take your rightful place and make sure you are back in time for dinner.”

In what is a painful scene in the Scriptures, Jesus resists the call of family and all their hopes and expectations. And then he takes a swipe at them that seems to cut deep. “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Well, not his blood family at that moment, because their wants and desires are at odds with who Jesus feels called to be.

As we feel the sting of that rebuke, we might wonder if we are in the firing line like the family of Jesus. I'm sure we'd like to think that we are

all busy doing the will of God, and therefore are front and centre family together, but often our certainties hide deeper truths.

There is something striking about the scene described. Jesus' family want him to go inside, away from the gathered crowd. Jesus always seems to be outside where the people are – streets, town squares, fields – but rarely inside and away from where people live their lives.

I wonder if that is a challenge to us as church. We are typically inside the house, and perhaps have family rituals that don't make an easy welcome to guests. While we believe our doors are open, many people find it hard to pass through them. Inside the house we risk domesticating who we are called to be. But Jesus got rid of barriers like these by meeting people where they were. He reminds us: 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

When the people demanded from Samuel a king, do you think they were doing the will of God? When Jesus' own kin demanded he leave the crowd and come to dinner, do you think they had the will of God in mind?

When we gather here on a Sunday morning, do we have the will of God in our hearts and minds? Just as the people of Israel struggled to abide by what God willed, we too struggle with all manner of comfort and promise that looks little like the will of God. In our human restlessness, we fall prey to tricks of advertisers and a gaze towards our neighbours. So the latest model car promises a freedom that we currently don't feel. Or the latest medical intervention promises to make us feel better about ourselves and the way others see us. Or a look over the fence only to notice our runabout dinghy is nothing compared to the neighbour's powerboat - just leaves us more in need of comfort.

Rev Dr Liam J Fraser wrote - *Because of our lack of faith, all of us have a tendency to worship, and love, and think about, and lust after things that are not God. This can be popularity, or success, or wealth, or sex, or food, or almost anything else one can think of. These idols, however, harm us. They promise us everything, but leave us unhappy and often morally culpable.*

Testing spirits or discerning the will of God is a challenging business, especially when normal expectations like those of family can get in the way. But I believe it begins by seeing beyond what can be seen in the now towards what is hidden and eternal. And that which is hidden and eternal points us back towards the God who brought the people of Israel out of the land of slavery, the one who was sovereign over their hearts and minds. This is the God that Jesus shows us. And Jesus shows us the love, mercy, and justice of God. And as he lived, he invites us to live.

It is a thing of great comfort that we have chronicles of Jesus' life in the Scriptures. For we all remain vulnerable to others like kings and strong leaders who promise much but deliver little. And in the great love story of God, God has reached out to people like you and me and those from the days of Samuel to put flesh and bone on the heart of God, that we may see what is hidden and eternal.

We will always need wisdom to discern between spirits and what may be the will of God in the moments of our lives, but Jesus invites us into a living journey that reveals eternal life to us.

We could do a lot worse than to leave these doors with a question to guide our living amidst all that tempts us to vain and futile comforts. "What would Jesus do?"

Do this, and he will call us, 'my mother, my brothers and sisters.'

## **WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD:**

WE SING 'Brother sister' (*TIS 650*)

OFFERING

## PRAYER

**Loving God, whose Life-giving Holy Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos at the dawn of creation – who breathed life into all beings, and who continues to work in all creation to sustain that life - Be with us now at this critical moment of our history.**

**Open our ears to the cries of the earth, to the suffering the effects of human exploitation, and to unbridled consumption.**

**As we dedicate this offering, may the winds of your Spirit blow through this place, compelling us to increase our compassion, for all your people and for all Creation. We offer this gift in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

## CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE & 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 from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

## SHARING FROM THE CHILDREN

WE SING 'Take my life and let it be' (TIS 599)

## SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

BLESSING and SENDING OUT