

# St. Margaret's Uniting Church Mooroolbark

Sunday 17th June, 2018

4<sup>th</sup> Week after Pentecost

Leader Mr Ken Davies

Reader Mrs Karen White

Preacher Rev Deacon Katharine Davies

## WELCOME

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

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD:

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people

GREETING AND 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 'Glory be to God the Father' (TIS 142)

CALL TO WORSHIP

OPENING PRAYER

## WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD:

READINGS 1 Samuel 15: 34 to 16:13 Samuel's faithfulness.

SHARING THE EARLY WORD

LEARNING A NEW SONG Psalm 47 TIS (29)

GOSPEL READING Mark 4:26-34

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

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND CONFESSION  
WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

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

## **REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES**

### **“Seekers and Followers”**

Today, one reading was about Samuel and his brave deed where, as a follower of God, he risked his life to anoint David to be King. It says Samuel heard from God that He had rejected Saul from being King, and Samuel was to go and find a king among Jesse’s sons. Samuel says “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me. But he still went and anointed David.

We also read about two of Jesus parables, important words for those of us who follow Jesus, because we want to learn what Our Lord was getting at. I’ll concentrate on the parables.

But first I’ll give a word to those of us who are seekers. The very first words in the book are these: Mark 1.1 “The beginning of the good news of Jesus”. Then it tells how Jesus started teaching: Mark 1.14 “Now after John was arrested Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news”. Some translations put gospel. It means the same thing.

I clearly remember as a child being taken to church with believing parents that I could not possibly be a Christian because it required of you to love your enemies, do this, do that etc. it was far too cramping.

Now if we look closer Jesus not only uses the word “gospel”, it is good news not bad news, but he also uses the word translated “Turn”. Jesus says he tells parables so that people could “hear and

hear but understand nothing” “otherwise they might turn to God“. He does not say there do this do that, he just uses the word “turn“. Nothing is asked of people but simply to turn to God. The story put on the screen to the children showed clearly what a kind loving God we have. God asks us to turn to him for living, and I, for one never regret it.

I’ll end this bit with the example over 3000 years ago. It does happen, people do turn. The Bible story of the times tell us the Israelite people, though in their land, were under the Philistines for 40 years Judges 13v1 “The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of The Lord. The Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines 40 years“. At one stage the Philistines even captured the ark and put in their temple to the god Dagon. It was in King David’s time these foreigners went back to their own lands. It was a bit before that the people turned. We read about it in Samuel “there was a movement throughout Israel to follow the Lord“. So it *has* happened all down the ages. People have *turned*.

And now for the parables of Jesus. The first read was this – “The Kingdom of God was as if someone would scatter seed on the ground” - then he would go about his daily jobs. He does not know how, but the seed would grow up and up, and it produces a harvest, which he reaps. What does it mean?

There is no talk of preparing the soil. The emphasis here is on growing *that happens*, and we don’t *know how*. Within a seed there is this growth. We *do* know about gardening, but we really do not know about why and how a seed has in it - *growth*.

Most of us have witnessed such an event - say some parsley just sprouting up, or a tomato plant, or a pumpkin from an odd seed in

the compost or a tree. This seed produces. For this scattering we have not laboured over it, or vexed ourselves for it. There is no mention of tilling the soil, fertilizing etc. but there is just *growth*.

I like Eduard Schweizer's comment on this parable. Professor of Theology in Zurich in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he believes this parable teaches Christians to be carefree, as Jesus also teaches elsewhere "Take no thought as to what you will wear" etc. Do all of our activities, and I quote here "feeling, thinking, doing, and speaking of which we are capable" - however do it without forcing things, without fretting, but in a carefree way, waiting with Jesus I quote Schweizer again: "for God to do what he is sure to do".

The second story is more well-known it is about a small seed of a mustard growing into a big tree which the birds came to and nested in its shade. From a pod picked from the footpath off an overhanging tree, to a pot, to a full grown tree (show them the seed and the picture of the tree), Jesus likens this to the Kingdom of God.

There is a small witness, not to be miscounted, of someone witnessing to Jesus by coming to church. There are really big things or widespread Christianity. A big thing is martyrdom starting with Jesus' martyrdom. Regarding widespread Christianity, the church was already quite large in Jesus' day (he sent out 72 to work for him). It grew exponentially after his death and resurrection. (Acts 2.41 "So those who welcomed his (Peter's) message were baptised and that day about three thousand persons were added").

We might not see increase here or there, or day by day, but we do century by century. As the famous Scottish theologian Barclay points out, when Elizabeth Fry went into English prisons in 1817, what was there? I quote "she found in the women's quarters three hundred

women and numberless children crammed into two small wards. They lived and cooked and ate and slept on the floor. The only attendants were one old man and his son. They crowded half naked, almost like beasts, begging for money which they spent on drink at the bar in the prison itself." This is unthinkable in Australia now.

The end of slavery in English countries is another example of improvement. Remember there were sealers living on the coasts in Victoria in the late 1770s early 1800s. Victoria was started in 1835. Slavery was accepted then, so it was OK for sealers to take Aboriginal men and women and do what they liked with them - whip them, work them day and night seven days a week, string them up on trees if they misbehaved, even kill them with impunity.

The mustard trees of those days were known to attract birds for their delicious seeds, and having birds was a well-known thing for talking about all nations. The Kingdom of God is changing the world. These things happen, we see now in China thousands of baptisms and not enough, by a long shot, of pastors to feed the new Christians. We are asked to help.

New Testaments or whole Bibles or parts of them are still being released, including in some aboriginal languages. The birds do make their nests in the tree.

The great thing about Jesus' parables is that we remember the stories, and are thus reminded of the truths they contain e.g. about the Kingdom of God.

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

WE SING 'Jesus the first and last' (AHB 154)

**Jesus, the first and last,  
my soul on you is cast:  
you did your work begin  
by blotting out my sin;  
you will the root remove'  
And perfect me in love.**

**Yet when the work is done,  
the work is but begun:  
partaker of your grace,  
I long to see your face;  
the first I prove below,  
the last I die to know.**

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 in 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**

DEDICATION SONG (TIS 313)

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 WITH THE CHILDREN

WE SING 'O Jesus I have promised' (TIS 595)

### **SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD:**

BLESSING AND SENDING OUT

May almighty God bless you,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

WE SING 'Father Bless us as we go' (TIS 781)

