

## **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

### **St Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark**

July 29<sup>th</sup> 2018

*Leader & Preacher - The Rev Ron Gordon*

#### **THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE**

Greeting: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

*And also with you*

Call to worship

Please stand and sing the hymn as the Bible is carried in

Hymn: 158 God has spoken by His prophets

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

#### **SERVICE OF THE WORD**

Psalm 14

Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."

They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;  
there is no one who does good.

The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind  
to see if there are any who are wise,  
who seek after God.

They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse;  
there is no one who does good,  
no, not one.

Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers  
who eat up my people as they eat bread,  
and do not call upon the Lord?

There they shall be in great terror,  
for God is with the company of the righteous.  
You would confound the plans of the poor,

but the Lord is their refuge.

O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!  
When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people,  
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

**Epistle** - Ephesians 3: 14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Early Word**

Hymn 465 Father in heaven

**Gospel** - John 6: 1-21

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples,

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

For the Word of the Lord            *Thanks be to God*

## **Sermon – Rev Ron Gordon**

John 6:11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.

# **The Greatest Miracle.**

## **1. A world of wonders.**

We live in a world of wonders where men walk on the moon, and now send a rocket off to Mars; and where people probe the universe for signs of life, all these things at tremendous cost, often ignoring the signs of death under their noses. Certainly there are spin-offs and we should be grateful for these crumbs from the tables of the affluent, but I see that a huge number of people don't even get the crumbs.

They often perish through hunger, disease and war, while we are engaged as far away (mentally and spatially) as humanly possible. Certainly let us expand our understanding of the cosmos, and I would not want to impugn the integrity of those who spend their lives at those tasks, but to me there is a point where it all becomes obscene. That is, if you line it up with the situation in which most of the world's people live and die.

Maybe that is a little too negative when many of us are here today because of the wonders of modern medicine. For that, thanks be to God! And there are wonders of modern science, like communications where our children, almost anywhere in the world, can be in touch with us, as if they were in the same room as us. While we are aware of the dangers and exploitation such wonders can bring, we can rejoice in so many wonderful human achievements.

These things are in the back of our minds when we read and hear the New Testament. What on earth do we make of the reading from John's Gospel this morning, which brings us two of the major miracles of Jesus at the Galilean Lake? The feeding of the 5,000 and the story of him walking on the water. We will look at each in turn and see what is to be made of them. Then we'll try and see what is the greatest miracle? In this exploration, and I want to be clear it is not an explanation, I am grateful for the web page of David Beswick. While I have used some of his material, he is not

responsible for the way in which I have understood it and have used it.

## **2. Feeding 5,000**

When Jesus saw the crowd, according to Mark ‘he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd’ (Mark 6:34). He immediately began to teach them. That is why they followed, to hear his words and to see his deeds. John just tells us a large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. (John 6:2).

John tells us that Jesus when he saw the crowd asked Philip : Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat? And Philip responded by mentioning the amount of money that would be needed. Not where, but how much. John notes that this was a test question for Philip because Jesus already knew what he would do.

Andrew then arrived with a small boy and his lunch, of five barley loaves and two fish: ‘But what are they among so many people? The people are seated on the grass and after ‘giving thanks’ (and ‘giving thanks’ is the word for Holy Communion, the Eucharist) Jesus distributed it. Then after they had eaten the scraps are gathered and they filled twelve baskets.

The Church had already learnt many lessons from this by the time John wrote the story. He tells the time: it was Passover time, which celebrated the deliverance from captivity, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the provision of food by God for Israel in the desert. Here Jesus feeds a crowd out by the Lake. There are twelve baskets left over; there are twelve disciples, just as there were 12 tribes of Israel. Do not imagine that these details are there by accident, because like the whole Gospel of John, these events are saturated in symbolism.

David Beswick suggests that there are different ways of seeing the feeding of the 5,000 maybe, for instance, as a psychological or social miracle. A small boy inspired by Jesus gives his lunch and set off a kind of chain reaction in which people were prepared to share what they had with one another. That sort of thing happens all over the world under all kinds of circumstances. However that does not explain how the disciples saw and reported it. They would have seen it clearly as the action of Jesus. We can see it as event in which Jesus is clearly at the centre.

Some of us may see it quite literally and have no problem with it. Others may prefer a different explanation. Others still, would ask a prior question about Jesus himself: just who is this who feeds a multitude in the desert, because how you answer that may colour your thinking about his words and deeds.

### **3. Walking on the water.**

As David Beswick points out so called ‘nature miracles’ are a different kettle of fish. For centuries we have thought of the laws of nature almost as if they are immutable, unchangeable. In our experience people do not walk on water. Yet the story is not just as plain as that. Listen to what John tells us: The disciples, without Jesus, had got into the boat and were rowing back across the lake and the sea became rough with a strong wind blowing.

When they had rowed about three or four miles they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going. Is this a kind of crossing of the Red Sea?

Jesus identified himself and their fear was banished. It was night and maybe they weren’t as far from land as they had thought.

Maybe they mistook Jesus walking on the sea shore, for him walking on the sea. There might be a naturalistic explanation for it. But we are still left with the impression it made on their minds and which is now cast in the Gospel story.

He identified himself to them and re-assured them that they had no grounds at all for fear. Their fears were calmed and they wanted to take him into the boat with them. Part of the clue lies in the identification of Jesus. Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus said “It is I!”; but a footnote in the NRSV says that the Greek word in John means “I am”.

Now that “I AM” happens to be a name, of whom? (Ex.3: 13,14) But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.’ He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM’ has sent me to you’.”

When Jesus said to the terrified disciples ‘I am’, it meant that Being Itself was present with them there on the Lake. David says: That is the whole point of the story and of all the signs that Jesus gave. If the Lord of Creation was present in the person of Jesus then the so-called nature miracles might not be out of order. It is the same as the question about the Bread of heaven who shared his life with the people.

If God has truly shared our life in Jesus then all kinds of possibilities are open to us. He takes the ordinary things of life, like our daily food, and makes them signs of his presence with his people everywhere and at all times, until finally the great feast in his Kingdom. When we are all at sea in the world and struggling to stay afloat He comes to us and brings calm and reassurance. That has always happened and still happens to us today.

The Greatest Miracle is not the Feeding of the 5,000 nor Jesus walking on the sea. The greatest miracle is, for those who will believe, the presence of the Lord of Creation, in our midst in Jesus, healing our diseases, forgiving our sin, loving us with an everlasting love and leading us to share his kind of eternal life.

Let us pray (for the faith to recognise God's presence in our world):

*God our Father, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendour of creation, and in the beauty of human life. Touched by your hand our world is holy. Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us, to share your blessings with our brothers and sisters, and to experience the joy of life in your presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

### **RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE**

Hymn: 432 Christ is made the sure foundation

Offering

Dedication prayer and Journey song

Congregational life

Prayers of the people and Lord's Prayer:

### **SENDING OUT OF THE PEOPLE**

Children's "Show and Tell"

Hymn 547 Be thou my vision

### **Benediction**

Hymn 549 God be in my head

AMEN