

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

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2018  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Welcome**

All are invited to share morning tea following the service

**WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD:**

ACKNOWLEDGING THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS

GREETING

WE SING 'Praise the Spirit in creation' (*TIS 415*)

CALL TO WORSHIP & OPENING PRAYER

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

SHARING THE EARLY WORD *Cecil the Lost Sheep*

WE SING 'Just like Jesus' (*ATAR 618*)

READING Mark 6:1-6a *The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth*

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

... for the word of the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD.**

## **REFLECTION – Part A *The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth***

In recent weeks, we have followed the action packed chapters of Mark, hearing about the power of Jesus. He has withstood temptation by the devil in the wilderness. As he began his ministry, he began to heal those who were sick, and part of this healing came through offering forgiveness of sins. We've heard dramatic stories where Jesus has power over unclean spirits, the things that possess us. And just last week we heard of a young girl who had died while he was distracted caring for an older woman. But without much fuss, Jesus raised the young girl back to life.

It's obvious that those from Jesus' home town of Nazareth haven't been tuning in. But just as obvious is they aren't interested in a journey of discovery, or finding good news in this upstart from their neighbourhood. *We know you, who do you think you are? You're a woody. You did a job for my uncle. Your mother, Mary has been looking for you. I went to school with your brothers and sisters. Who do you think you are?*

It's obvious that those who've tuned in to the gospel are invited to see who Jesus is, in contrast to the villagers. We are invited to remember the deeds of power Jesus has done everywhere else, but seems unable to do here. Now we see Jesus is powerless. It is as though he relies on people being open towards salvation. He is astonished to see their unbelief. And maybe we are astonished that *he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.*

**READING** Mark 6:6b-13 *The Mission of the Twelve*

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not

welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

## **REFLECTION – Part B *The mission of the twelve***

If we were astonished that Jesus was without power, how astonishing is his solution? Jesus sends the disciples, the twelve out, two by two. There is a commissioning where they are given authority over unclean spirits and some instructions:

Be lighter and simpler (to use words from our Synod vision and mission principles). (It ought be noted that going out in such a way was a bit easier in the days of Jesus. In a pre-industrial world, the disciples found themselves on the breadline whether at home or on the road. There wasn't a lot of difference.)

tell it like it is. Honour those who give you a welcome; leave where there is no welcome.

As we remember what happened to Jesus, we fear the disciples are up for rejection, especially when the instructions speak of shaking dust off feet and the like. Yet they go out faithfully and they have authority over demons, they proclaim repentance and they even heal the sick!

I'm not sure any of this is filling us with confidence. I imagine we all fear rejection, and how do you feel about having authority over demons and healing the sick. It's hard enough proclaiming repentance in a world like ours, whatever that means.

In hearing this Scripture, it's easy for us to remain powerless. It is tempting not to try because of our fears. I know I'm vulnerable like most to feelings of rejection. How are we to respond without selling out or providing a set of excuses?

I think in part the answer lies at the root of Jesus apparent lack of power in Nazareth. We've heard this is not normal, so why does the lack of belief in him make a difference? Scott Hoezee tells a story that might help us understand what is going on. He relates a story about his wedding day, and the video that was taken during the reception.

*We'd just had a wonderful lunch at a fine Grand Rapids restaurant. My bride and I had selected the menu ourselves: Dijonaise Amish Chicken Breast, Pan-Roasted Vegetable Medley, Caramelized Onion Tart. But at one point during the video footage shot just after lunch, you can hear my father-in-law ask one of his relatives how they enjoyed their meal, only to hear one of our grumpier relatives grouse, "There were no potatoes."*

Hoezee concludes that Jesus did not do miracles, because people in his home town missed the point. Why throw the best of the good news of the kingdom of God at people who have no way of appreciating how much God loves them? The problem is not a lack of power, it is the lack of reception through unbelief.

So Jesus invites the disciples to go out into places of both belief and unbelief, hopefully aware that they have power and authority through Jesus himself. There is a sending out to touch places of need, but not to hang about where good news is rejected, like the example of Nazareth.

That sending out applies to us as well. We are sent with the power and authority of Jesus to touch places of need. It is why we speak of Asylum seekers, First peoples, climate change, homelessness, RYDA, our neighbours and our families.

But as Jesus was rejected, we too can expect the same. I'm not sure the level of rejection is greater today than it was in the day of Jesus, although it is tempting to imagine that is so. But as we reflect on the many places of unbelief we have experienced in our Christian journey, we might just pause for a moment with the idea of shaking the dust off our feet where good news is rejected.

There is a view that this is not a negative, condemning, or even critical thing. Rather it is faithful and realistic given a lack of hospitality. The original Greek can be understood as this act being a witness to those who are not welcoming. Which means it could be seen as leaving an imprint - a prophet has been here. A seed of the good news has been left, to find root or not, but it has been left anyhow.

Faithful followers of Jesus Christ, I'm sure you know that the time when record crowds would gather to hear Billy Graham or evangelists like him, have long gone. And like it, the time when our success or faithfulness is measured by full attendance in worship also belongs to another time. In fact that experience of the 1960s and the fuller churches for a while after, come as an unusual blip in the history of the church. Mostly the lived experience of disciples of Jesus Christ is the struggle of sending out, some good news, and a lot of rejection.

Measures of success in numbers do not belong to this story of the gospel. Rather faithfulness lies in going out to where people may be found, in fighting against systems of oppression, in advocacy for those who cannot speak, in offering release and healing for the least of these in the name of Jesus Christ.

We have the authority of Jesus to go and be sent. That isn't to swell our numbers back in this place of worship, however good and comforting that might seem. It is to offer authentic love through the one who loves us. May this be our lives, may this be our passion.

For as we have already heard in earlier in the gospel of Mark, these words from Jesus, 'Whoever does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother' (3:35)

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

WE SING 'Inspired by love and anger' (TIS 674)

OFFERING

PRAYER

**Loving God - we dedicate this offering,**

**with the hope that all we offer and do –  
will be a source of new expressions  
of your love,  
of your justice,  
of your character,  
of your mission,  
and of your Kingdom on earth. Amen.**

## CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

### ASSEMBLY MARRIAGE REPORT

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of calling and sending,  
we bring our hopes, dreams and concerns  
as your gathered community.

As we hear of marriage  
changes of culture,  
desire for inclusion,  
and changes beyond our imagining,  
we pray for the Spirit to move and guide your church.

Help us be a prayerful community of your grace.  
Help us be a loving community towards your people.  
Help us to listen and discern your call to act  
in ways that model the gospel of Jesus Christ to and for all.

Be with all who gather as delegates  
to the Assembly meeting of the Uniting Church.  
Be with those who are tense or anxious because they fear change.  
Be with those who are tense or anxious because they fear lack of  
change. Be with those who have thought long and deep about issues  
before the church, and those who join the conversation from today.

God of calling and sending,  
help us be open to the movement of your Spirit upon us  
as members of the church, as communities of grace, as the church

universal. Help us discern for our day what it means to have authority over unclean spirits, and what it means to bear good news to a world in crisis.

We pray you be near all people and places where crisis strikes. We recall the concerns of our day – massive dislocation of people who are part of the global refugee crisis; concerns for the well-being of your good creation, as the earth feels the impact of climate change, environmental degradation, and unfettered consumption of the global economy; places of war and terror; places of abuse and neglect.

And in the quiet now we pray for concerns close to us ...

God of compassion and grace, grant us healing and courage in our lives. Be with those who mourn, and those struggling near the end of life. May we remember that nothing can keep us from the love of God shown through Jesus Christ. In whose name we pray, amen.

#### 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

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

WE SING TIS 571 'Forth in your name O Lord I go'

#### SENDING OUT & BLESSING

SENDING OUT SONG (*ATOK 412*)