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**St. Margaret’s Uniting Church Mooroolbark Sunday 5 th August, 2018 – Rev Arnie Wierenga**

## **St. Margaret’s Uniting Church Mooroolbark**

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2018 – Rev Arnie Wierenga  
12<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

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 ‘Joyful, joyful, we adore you’ (TIS 152)

1

Joyful, joyful, we adore you,  
God of glory, God of love;  
hearts unfold like flowers before you  
opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,  
drive the dark of doubt away;  
giver of immortal gladness,  
fill us with the light of day.

2

All your works with joy surround you,  
earth and heav'n reflect your rays,  
stars and angels sing around you,  
centre of unbroken praise.  
Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
flowery meadow, flashing sea,  
singing bird and flowing fountain  
call to praise you joyfully.

3

You are giving and forgiving,  
ever blessing, ever blest,  
well-spring of the joy of living,  
ocean-depth of happy rest.  
You our Father, Christ our brother,  
all are yours who live in love;  
teach us how to love each other,  
lift us to your joy above.

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

God of creation, You brought life to all that we see. You set the boundaries of the universe and placed us within its care

**Creator God, breathe life into Your creation**

Holy Spirit, You bind Your children together in community. Your bonds transcend borders created by humankind. You kindle the fire within us that stirs our passion for faith, justice, and reconciliation

**Spirit God, inspire us to reconcile**

Jesus the Christ, You came to teach and to lead. You showed us the cost of discipleship when You stood up against the powers of the world, and they tried to suppress Your truth by sentencing You to death. Your life was more powerful than death and Your truth lives on in us.

**Jesus the Christ, help us reflect Your light of truth and peace**

OPENING PRAYER

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

SHARING THE EARLY WORD

WE SING 'Part of a family (ATFG 561)

*Part of a family, interconnected*

*this is community:*

*welcoming strangers, visiting neighbours,*

*this gives us dignity.*

Care for the earth and sea  
we need to keep them free.

Care for the earth and sea.

This gives us dignity

Care for the ones we meet  
love is the face we see

Care for the ones we meet.

This gives us dignity

Part of a family, interconnected  
this is community:

welcoming strangers, visiting neighbours,

this gives us dignity.

Sharing our joy and pain,  
praying and keeping faith  
by sharing our joy and pain.  
Singing a song of rights,  
imaging God in life  
by singing a song of rights.

Part of a family, interconnected  
this is community:  
welcoming strangers, visiting neighbours,  
this gives us dignity.

Talk to the lonely, bind up the broken,  
this is community.  
A glass of water shared with the thirsty,  
this makes for dignity,  
this makes for dignity  
this is community.

#### EPISTLE READING Ephesians 4: 25- 5: 2 *Rules for the New Life*

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be

imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

THE GOSPEL      John 6: 35, 41-51

Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

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

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

... Know that in Jesus' name you are forgiven, and be at peace. **Thanks be to God.**

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

## The simple matter of imitating God

I wonder what it might look like if we were imitators of God, as the apostle Paul encourages those in Ephesus?

It's a big call – in fact this is the only place in the Scriptures that such a thing is called for. But imitating God? Do you really mean that Paul? We can imagine imitating Jesus, because he was one among us. We can imagine imitating the early church even. But imitating God?

Thankfully Paul provides something of a checklist to help guide us. But before we look in detail, we might pause to reflect on the realities of our world, because they provide some context.

I wonder what imitating God might look - in a climate that warms, a place where fake news is rife, where bullying tactics alarm us both on field and in the postures of leaders, where children and sovereignty is stolen or ignored, where borders become walls to keep folk and ideologies in and out.

This week I read about a South Korean man who was a teenager during the Korean war. Rev Dr David Kwang Sun Suh, now in his 80s, tells of the hatred he felt towards North Koreans after he found the body of his father, a Presbyterian minister, who had been executed by Communist fighters. He vowed to avenge his father. But later he heard that many in South Korea had also been killed after they were wrongly accused of being Communists. He saw that pain came from the division caused by war and continues this day to be an activist for peace.

I've seen bitter division in families at times of conflict. When trauma strikes we typically look after our own and treat others as bitter enemies. I've watched families self-destruct as the lashing out in pain strikes fatal blows. And I learned this week that my Aboriginal family in NE Arnhemland have a word for 'selfish' that literally means 'lacking in kin', or living as though you have not connected.

Whatever it means to be imitators of God, I'm sure you will agree that division, hatred, revenge does not seem to sit at the heart of it.

Paul (the apostle) knew more than he probably wished about conflict. The early church seemed to behave like families divided over practice or doctrine, over claims of who is in and who should be excluded. So his

letters to churches like the Ephesians are all about how to live together as faithful communities.

In the context of finding Christ at our heart, Paul urges us to be imitators of God. And the checklist for what that can look like have been given the title by the editors as 'Rules for the New Life'.

As you hear these dot points, I wonder if you can imagine how they can speak into the mess of our world, how they might be in stark contrast to what we see in 2018?

- Put away falsehood
- Speak truth to neighbours (because we belong to each other)
- Be angry, but do not sin
- Don't steal, work honestly, and share with the needy
- Speak with grace
- build up, don't destroy
- Forgive as God in Christ has forgiven you.
- Love as you are loved by God in Christ.

I'm sure we could mine this passage for a month of Sundays, but I guess we are getting the idea. Paul invites us to live in ways that sharply contradict most of the public behaviour we see in our streets or discover on our news or social media feeds. It was shocking, for example, to watch Four Corners this week as they exposed the motivations behind Facebook. Behaviours that destroy families or incite violence have a way of creating revenue for this incredibly wealthy company. What might Facebook be like if instead Paul's rules for imitating God were their yardstick?

It looks like this is a summary of the whole of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is an invitation to remember what God has done with you and me. Through Jesus we find an invitation to belong as family together. Here we are all valued for who we are. Here we are loved without earning

that love in any way. Here we are given rest, solace, life from whatever it is that haunts us. And in response we are asked to see Christ in each other.

Being an imitator of God begins here. Last week we shared the peace as a reminder that we all belong to the body of Christ and are all important in it. Offering our hands towards one another is an ancient sign of peace, because we offer our 'fighting hands' to each other and we do not come holding weapons. It is more than the common handshake though, because we offer each other a blessing. As we offer peace we are imitating God, and seeing that in one another we are joined, we belong, we are family together.

God's peace, or genuine peace invites us into stories like the persistent widow of Luke 18. In that story she seeks justice from an unjust judge. She won't let up, she persists. Eventually the judge reasons that she will go away and stop being a problem if he offers her justice. By contrast, God grants justice quickly and listens to those who cry out.

And if we are to be imitators of God, then surely that is how we must act as well. Without justice for all and everywhere, we shall never have peace anywhere. And as Paul encourages the Galatian church, 'never grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we don't give up' (Galatians 6:9).

There was another important thing happened this week. In the top-end of the country, many gathered for the annual Garma festival. The topic this year is about truth telling. You may notice this is one of the things on the apostle's checklist for imitating God. Much can be said about truth with regards to Indigenous Australians and how lies have led to countless injustices against them. This is not the time or place to do other than remind again that God demands justice and truth telling of all of us, and that when one in the body (or kin or family or community) is suffering, we all suffer too.

So I direct you to an astonishing talk given by author Richard Flannagan. He speaks of us as a nation with an opportunity, to bring



about peace and justice if only we dare to grasp the truth of who we are.  
He says:

*I bring you a warning.*

*The world is being undone before us. History is once more moving, and it is moving to fragmentation on the basis of concocted differences, toward the destruction of democracy using not coups and guns to entrench autocracies and dictators, but the ballot box and social media.*

*We see gay and transgender people being once more scapegoated, and we see race and religion used to divide. We see truth everywhere denied. Duterte. Orbán. Erdoğan. Putin. Democracy is withering in Poland. Slovakia. Cambodia. Once great nations are lost in division that with each passing day grows more intractable. The chaos of Brexit. The catastrophe of Trump's white nationalism.*

*My warning is this: if we here in Australia do not reimagine ourselves we will be undone too.*

Into that space he talks of the opportunity of adopting the Uluru Statement from the Heart. He explains that in this current climate, those who gathered in the centre to put together the statement seeking sovereign recognition did so with incredible grace and dignity. Despite being locked out for more than two hundred years, Indigenous leaders were offering to recognise and accept the sovereignty of the Commonwealth in return for having their own sovereignty within recognised.

Flanagan says, *The Uluru statement was modest in its proposals but it demands a radical recognition of who we are. We are not a nation, we are state divided by race and a refusal to acknowledge history.*

I wonder what it looks like to be imitators of God?

Is there a hint of it in the truth telling within the Uniting Church where we declared some years ago that *terra nullius* is a lie? Is there more of it where at the Assembly meeting last month the church agreed to support sovereignty of the first peoples of this land?

What does it look like to be imitators of God:

In this place?

In our divided world?

May we find ways to live into the vision of the apostle Paul for the church. May we find those deep connections to each other that are fuelled by the love of God shown us through Christ. May we find places for grace, love and reconciliation, because we have known this is God's way. And may we be known as imitators of God, as connectors to kin of all time and place, as people of justice and profound peace.

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

WE SING 'Beauty for brokenness' (*Graham Kendrick*)

Beauty for brokenness

Hope for despair

Lord, in the suffering

This is our prayer

Bread for the children

Justice, joy, peace

Sunrise to sunset

Your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives

Cures for their ills

Work for the craftsman

Trade for their skills

Land for the dispossessed

Rights for the weak

Voices to plead the cause

Of those who can't speak

God of the poor

Friend of the weak

Give us compassion we pray

Melt our cold hearts

Let tears fall like rain  
Come, change our love  
From a spark to a flame

Refuge from cruel wars  
Havens from fear  
Cities for sanctuary  
Freedoms to share  
Peace to the killing-fields  
Scorched earth to green  
Christ for the bitterness  
His cross for the pain

Rest for the ravaged earth  
Oceans and streams  
Plundered and poisoned  
Our future, our dreams  
Lord, end our madness  
Carelessness, greed  
Make us content with  
The things that we need

Lighten our darkness  
Breathe on this flame  
Until your justice  
Burns brightly again  
Until the nations  
Learn of your ways  
Seek your salvation  
And bring you their praise

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.**

WE SING TIS 416, verse 1

Great God, Your Spirit, like the wind -  
unseen but shaking things we see -  
will never leave us undisturbed,  
fulfil our dreams, or set us free,  
until we turn from faithless fear  
and prove the promise of Your grace,  
in justice, peace and daily bread,  
with joy for all the human race.

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

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

WE SING TIS 417 'Loving Spirit, loving Spirit'

Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,  
You have chosen me to be –  
You have drawn me to Your wonder,  
You have set Your sign on me.

Like a mother You enfold me,  
hold my life within Your own,  
feed me with Your very Body,  
form me of Your flesh and bone.

Like a father You protect me,  
teach me the discerning eye,  
hoist me up upon Your shoulder,  
let me see the world from high.

SENDING OUT & BLESSING

SENDING OUT SONG TIS 417 'Loving Spirit, loving Spirit'

*(continued)*

Friend and lover, in Your closeness  
I am known and held and blessed:  
in Your promise is my comfort,  
in Your presence I may rest.

Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,  
You have chosen me to be -  
You have drawn me to Your wonder,  
You have set Your sign on me.