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

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2018  
14<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.**

INTROIT 'Come all you people'

Come all you people,  
come and praise your Maker;  
Come all you people,  
come and praise your Maker;  
Come all you people,  
come and praise your Maker;  
Come now and worship the Lord.

## 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**

Come, let us worship God.

## OPENING PRAYER

WE SING 'All are welcome' (*Marty Haugen*)

Let us build a house where love can dwell  
and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell

how hearts learn to forgive.  
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
rock of faith and vault of grace;  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
and words are strong and true,  
where all God's children dare to seek  
to dream God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
and as symbol of God's grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found  
in water, wine and wheat:  
a banquet hall on holy ground  
where peace and justice meet.  
Here the love of God, through Jesus,  
is revealed in time and space;  
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach  
beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
and live the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
bear the image of God's face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.

All are welcome, all are welcome,  
All are welcome in this place.

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

### SHARING THE EARLY WORD

*Lost Sheep – Bill the Brilliant Branch*

WE SING 'Standing in the need of prayer'

It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord  
Standing in the need of prayer  
It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord  
Standing in the need of prayer

Not my father, not my mother  
But it's me, oh Lord  
Standing in the need of prayer

Not my sister, not my brother  
But it's me, oh Lord  
Standing in the need of prayer

Not the people that are shoutin'  
But it's me, oh Lord  
Standing in the need of prayer

Not the members I've been doubting

But it's me, oh Lord  
Standing in the need of prayer.

EPISTLE READING Ephesians 6:10-20 *The Whole Armour of God*

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

THE GOSPEL John 6:56-69 *The Words of Eternal Life*

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were

complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.'

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

... 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 – Rev Arnie Wierenga**

## **Persevering with the saints**

I'm sure you've heard the apostle Paul's description of the *Armour of God* many times, and probably heard just as many sermons about it. It is an imposing description, invoking fearsome battles or apocalyptic imagery. And this is perhaps not surprising because Paul has endured the military might of Rome and felt first-hand the harsh punitive system of authority they meted out to further the empire.

As Paul is in prison, and his field of view has little more than bricks, bars and guards, it is little wonder he writes about armour in our stand against whatever forces of evil impact us.

Belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, flaming arrows, helmet, and sword are an interesting way to introduce conflict that followers of Jesus have endured through the ages. I don't think we've ever needed to look far to see the word of God in conflict with the world in which faithful live. Indeed, our faith is founded on conflict at its heart – with Jesus tried and crucified by Rome in collusion with local Religious Authorities. As already mentioned, Paul was imprisoned often for his faith, and he was not alone. The early church records people being martyred for believing in Jesus Christ, with Stephen the first recorded case. We can't do justice to the history of Christianity in this moment, but persecution and conflict continue. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was martyred for his stand against Hitler while largely the church remained silent; Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated for his work for justice; Oscar Romero was killed while officiating communion for similar reasons.

It is hardly cheery stuff, and we can well understand the need for good armour or protection against the dark prevailing forces. Although to give this some perspective, mostly these things have been distant from our lives. I'm reminded of something that Rev. Berlin Guerrero says. He was here in supply ministry some years back, so you may remember he was persecuted and imprisoned in the Philippines for his faith. Now a Uniting Church minister, Berlin notes that it is too difficult to be a Christian in his home country, and too easy to be one here.

I agree it is too easy for us. We are rarely pushed to a point where we know where we stand and why we stand for our faith. We are comfortable and complacent, and our culture and even our political leaders want that from us. There is nothing worse for leaders than pesky thinking and committed believers taking a stand against whatever policy or practice we feel is unjust. And it is hard in Australia to muster enthusiasm for things like justice for Asylum Seekers, or action to mitigate Climate Change, or for sovereignty for Aboriginal Australians.

While I'm sure that in some ways Berlin would have needed good armour in the Philippines, in Australia we perhaps need a different vision of the things Paul speaks of to the church at Ephesus. I wonder

what it is we need this week as we reflect on perhaps the ugliest chapter in Australian politics. What might we as followers of Jesus bring with us into public reflection on that sphere of our lives? How might we stand up against evil (for it surely is a form of evil we've been witnessing) this day? How will truth, righteousness, proclamation, faith, salvation, the Spirit and the word of God speak into the current malaise of our country and our community?

While the culture and language we find in Paul's letter is distant from our own experience, one thing we can take from him is an insistence on being engaged in the things of the world. Therefore we need appropriate clothing. If we are to follow Christ, we are involved in the things of Christ – and fundamentally that is the sharing of good news and bringing about the kingdom of God in the places we call home.

Do you see the kingdom of God at work in Australia?

Do you see it in action in Mooroolbark and surrounding suburbs that you represent?

Do you see it at work within your families?

I wonder what such a thing looks like? If we take Paul's example, it seems to be a stance of opposition to all that is evil or opposed to Jesus Christ. And that need not be a defensive thing as perhaps armour indicates. It might be an active stance in both small and big ways. I suggest Paul uses the image of armour so we can be strong in who we are as believers. Standing firm is a big thing for him, and he was very good at it in the face of adversity. He didn't literally go out and face the Roman Legion on the battlefield, but he did persist at things for the sake of the kingdom.

So, what would it look like for us to stand firm, to persist, to not be overwhelmed or perhaps sucked into complacency by the world about us?

One of the implications of soldier imagery and this idea of standing firm is to remember and believe that we are not on this journey alone. There is strength in numbers. Together we walk to the same rhythm and beat the same drum. The Roman Legion is strong because it is a cohesive

body of many, all committed to the same thing. If you like, it is the antithesis to what we have seen in government this week.

In the church, we call this community, the body of Christ. And this gets us to the heart of Paul's words. His call beyond words about armour are for us to proclaim the gospel of peace. Think about that for a moment. Not warring, but peace. Not the peace we have heard from Rome – threats and intimidation that force people to comply. But the gospel of peace. Faith, righteousness, salvation, love, justice.

What does the gospel of peace look like here at St. Margaret's?

I believe the Church Council meeting this week proclaimed a gospel of peace in one of its decisions. One of our local churches, the Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship, has been offering a community meal for many years but needed to find a new venue. Council has invited our fellow believers in Christ to continue their ministry by offering our place here as support. We recognised that we cannot do or offer what they are doing. But we can support grassroots ministry as we proclaim a gospel of peace more widely to our community.

What does the gospel of peace look like if we cast a view towards Canberra? How might we speak in faith in that place? How might we stand firm in our convictions and proclaim a gospel of peace towards politicians and all they supposedly represent?

Friends, regardless of whether we see that evil threatens to overwhelm us or we are too comfortable in our surrounds, the apostle calls us to stand firm and be engaged in the issues of our day – in public life, in our community, and also within our families. And so, let us continue to find ways to proclaim the gospel in places where it appears absent, for the sake of the world.

Paul ends with these words: *Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery*

*of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.*

So, pray in the Spirit at all times. Persevere for all the saints. Pray for those who do what you cannot do in the name of Christ, but do also what others cannot do in Christ's name. And finally, support one another as we stand firm together as the body of Christ and communion of saints.

## **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.**

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    AHB 455/TIS 547 'Be thou my vision'

1. Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;  
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
2. Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;  
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;  
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;  
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.
3. Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight;  
Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;

Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my high Tow'r:  
Raise Thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.

4. Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,  
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:  
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,  
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.
5. High King of Heaven, my victory won,  
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heav'n's Sun!  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

#### SENDING OUT & BLESSING

SENDING OUT SONG      TIS 749 'Thuma mina'

Send me, Jesus;  
send me Jesus;  
send me, Jesus;  
send me Lord.

Lead me, Jesus;  
Lead me Jesus;  
Lead me, Jesus;  
Lead me Lord.

Fill me, Jesus;  
Fill me Jesus;  
Fill me, Jesus;  
Fill me Lord.

I will go, Lord;  
I will go, Lord:  
in Your Name, Lord,  
I will go.