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St. Margaret's Uniting Church

Mooroolbark

Sunday 30th September, 2018 - 18th Sunday after Pentecost.

Preacher: Paul Miles

(who is seeking Accreditation as a Lay Preacher)

We Gather to worship God

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri People. Please stand as the Holy Bible is carried in

Greeting & Call to Worship

Hymn: TIS 590 - What a friend we have in Jesus!

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh what peace we often forfeit
Oh what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Jesus is our only refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer
Do thy friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you
You will find a solace there

Prayer of Adoration & Confession

Eternal God, Lord of heaven and earth, we praise you for your greatness. Your wisdom is seen in all your works. Your grace and truth are revealed in Jesus Christ your Son. Your presence and power are given to us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, blessed Trinity, we worship and adore you for ever and ever. Amen.

CONFESSION

O God,
we confess the blindness that is not even aware of sinning;
the pride that dares not admit that it is wrong;
the selfishness that can see nothing but its own will;
the righteousness that knows no fault;
the callousness that has ceased to care;
the defiance that does not regret its own sins;
the evasion that always tries to make excuses;
the coldness of heart that is too hardened to repent.
God, we are sinners; be merciful to us.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. --
Romans 5:8
Hear then Christ's word of grace: our sins are forgiven. *Thanks be to God*

We Listen to God's word:

An Early Word

I have a story for you.

It is a true story about an 8 year old girl in India.

One day she went to the Temple, and said to the Priest, "I want to see God, show me God".

The Priest said "Hmmm".

"Come back tomorrow and I will show you God."

The next day, the little girl had her driver take her to the Temple before school.

She saw the Priest, and said "I want to see God, show me God".

The Priest said "Hmmm".

"It is close to school time, so come back tomorrow, and I will show you God".

The next day, undeterred, the girl left extra early in the morning, and had her driver take her to the Temple before school.

She saw the priest and said "I want to see God, show me God"

The Priest said "Hmmmmm".

"Come back tomorrow and I will show you God"

The little girl said "No. You told me yesterday that you would show me God today".

"I am not going to go to school today, I am going to stay right here until you show me God".

The priest said "Hmmmmm".

"OK, in order for you to see God, you must give God something".

"God will not show up first, but first you must give something, then God will accept it".

"What will you give God?"

The girl rummaged through her school bag, and found some chocolate. Her Mama always makes sure she has chocolate in her bag, because sometimes the school lunches are very bad, and only just a piece of toast.

"I will give God my chocolate" said the girl.

"Good" said the Priest. When you get home from school, give God your chocolate.

The next day, the girl was back at the Temple.

The Priest saw her and asked "Did you see God?"

The girl replied "I sure did, my Papa and brother were with me, and I gave God my chocolate".

"I am very upset". "I told God off! God took all of my chocolate and didn't leave any for me!"

The next day, the girl again got home from school, and gave God her chocolate.

God didn't take any chocolate.

From that day forward, that girl never went to sleep unless she had a prayer chain around her ankle.

And she never went out from the house unless the prayer chain was around her wrist.

She told her Mama about the chocolate.

She said "Papa and Brother can see God, I can see God, in fact, God is hugging me right now".

"Why can't you see God?"

You see, the little girl could always have seen God.

The Priest didn't add something to her to enable her to see God, the Priest took something away from her.

He took away her doubt.

And it is the same for all of us.

Prayer with the Children

May the Light of Christ go with you.

PSALM 124 – Responsive Psalm

Our help is in the name of the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.

Our help is in the name of the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.

If the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel now say; If the Lord had not been on our side, when enemies rose up against us; Then would they have swallowed us up alive in their fierce anger towards us;

Our help is in the name of the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.

Then would the waters have overwhelmed us and the torrent gone over us; Then would the raging waters have gone right over us. Blessèd be the Lord! he has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.

Our help is in the name of the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.

We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Our help is in the name of the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.

Old Testament Reading

A reading from the book of Esther, Chapter 7: 1-6, 9-10 Chapter 9: 20-22

So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me - that is my petition - and the lives of my people - that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king." Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?" Esther said, "A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated. Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, as the days on which the Jews

gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

Hear the word of the Lord - **thanks be to God**

Gospel Reading:

The gospel according to Mark, Chapter 9: 38-50

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Hymn TIS 473 – Community of Christ

Community of Christ, who make the cross your own,
live out your creed and risk Your life for God alone:
the God who wears your face, to whom all worlds belong,
whose children are of every race and every song.

Community of Christ, look past the Church's door

and see the refugee, the hungry, and the poor.
Take hands with the oppressed, the jobless in your street,
take towel and water, that you wash your neighbour's feet.

Community of Christ, through whom the word must sound –
cry out for justice and for peace the whole world round:
disarm the powers of war and all that can destroy,
turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish into joy.

When menace melts away, so shall God's will be done,
the climate of the world be peace and Christ its Sun;
our currency by love and kindness our law,
our food and faith be shared as one for evermore.

Proclamation of the Word

Themes: God's Divine Grace.
Salvation
Outsiders
Social structure upheaval
Trouble and danger – faith and works

Esther:

Context:

This book was written in Hebrew, does not have any implied Greek language, and so it can be established that it was written at around the time of the events in the book.

There is no mention of God in this book at all, but very much implied.

It is written to explain why the Israelites celebrated the feast of Purim.

The use of irony is prolific throughout the whole book as is also the use of satire, recurring themes and things coming in pairs.

The theological message is Divine Sovereignty, without even mentioning God explicitly.

Apply the themes:

God's Divine Grace and Salvation are a hallmark of this story:

Queen Esther herself, and the Jewish nation are in danger of genocide.

The future Saviour being born in Israel is in danger, and by extension the salvation of the world through the church is in danger here too. God's plans are in danger. This divine grace comes in the form of circumstance upon circumstance, good luck you might say, and the application of wisdom and good timing.

Outsiders:

The Jewish people were outsiders in this story, being captives in the land Harbona, the king's Eunuch, an actor in this story, is an outsider to the nation of Israel, but is used as part of the salvation story.

Social structure upheaval:

The Jews were going to be made slaves, and robbed of their livelihoods. They had to hide their identity, they were seemingly powerless.

This was turned on its head, and Haman's wealth was given to Mordecai and they became a protected people under the king.

7:10 John Calvin said: "Man falls as God's providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault."

Trouble, danger, faith and works:

Esther was put in a hard position.

Her nation's survival depended on her.

The faith of the Israelite nation was placed with Esther.

By faith Esther had to speak up, put herself in great danger, and act wisely.

7:1 Not everything we need must be attained immediately! In this case a crucial deadline is approaching, but the queen is patient, awaiting the right time to gain the desired result, literally the salvation of her people.

7:4 Accuser – literally the devil

Questions to reflect on:

If God is working his plans through the lives of these people, what does it mean for us?

Do we see God at work in our lives, in the circumstances of the Church life and life at home?

In what ways is God working his purpose out in us?

We arguably live in a post-Christian society, so are we outsiders? In what ways are we like the Jews in Esther?

And like Harbona the Eunuch, who assisted the Jews inadvertently, what does that mean in working with people outside of the Kingdom?

And as Esther, one of the great women of the Bible was faithful, wise and brave, what impact does that have in the way that we as people of the Kingdom can emulate?

Mark:

Context:

Jesus and the Disciples had just passed straight through Galilee and went to Capernaum.

Chapter 8:30 says this was Jesus who didn't want anyone to know where they were; he was teaching his disciples.

The disciples had just argued amongst themselves about who is the greatest.

Christ famously takes a child in his arms and teaches them to be humble as far as their perceived position was.

This motif seems to carry on in the next chapter also.

This is a time in the Gospel that Jesus was soon to head to Jerusalem and die, and the disciples were receiving teaching in a more urgent manner.

Apply themes:

God's Divine Grace. Salvation:

Christ's teachings were a radical change in the way people perceived a Kingdom to be.

With the nation of Israel always in a state of war, either fighting to stay free, or under another empire, people expected more of the same from God's kingdom.

But that is exactly what they needed to be saved from also.

Jesus didn't threaten with death, but with life!

Instead of acts of war, acts of kindness.

Instead of radical following of rules, a radical away of sin.

Instead of saving just the nation of Israel; saving the world through a new Israel.

Instead of works through power, works by faith.

Outsiders:

Earlier on in this chapter, we see the disciples unable to cast out a demon.

But now, here is an outsider – obviously a follower of Christ but not one of the 12 or 40, doing just that, casting out demons.

Here we see that the disciples wanted some sort of ownership over the power they had been given.

9:38-40 St Theophlact says: "See how divine grace is at work even in those who are not his disciples"

Social structure upheaval:

9:35 The Disciples were only just taught not to think in the structures of power in this world, but to be a servant-leader.

9:42 "little ones" includes all who have a childlike humility and simplicity, all who are poor in spirit.

Christ speaks about amputation of bodily parts.

9:43-48 This is only a figurative amputation, and can refer to sinful actions, as well as harmful relationships, that sometimes need to be severed for the salvation of all parties.

Christ's ministry was not one of exclusive power, but inclusive.

9:48 their worm does not die, and the fire is unquenched – refers to Isaiah 66:24, God's final judgement on the wicked.

The word used here for 'hell' is the Greek word Gehenna.

Gehenna is the name of the rubbish dump in Jerusalem.

If you could think of the worst place on earth for a Jewish person, it would be this.

Stinking rotting refuse matter, where many worms (remember touching one would make you ceremonial unclean) are eating away the refuse, and in the rubbish dump, adding to the smell, were fires that never went out, it was this that was used as the opposite of entering into the sweet after-life.

Trouble and danger – faith and works:

9:49 Being seasoned with fire means being tested to see if one's faith and works are genuine. In saying that every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt, Jesus is quoting Leviticus 2:13 in which salt stands for the remembrance of God's covenant with His people.

Questions to reflect

What do we think of people who do good works but are not Christians?

What about those people who are nominal Christians, for example, those who have been encultured with the fruits of our Christian culture in society, but who do not go to Church?

What about good works done by churches that are considered heretical?

And what about power structure?

Is it men, then women then children?

Is it children, women then men?

Is it women, children and then men?

Is it full equality?

Do intelligent and rich people trump the less intelligent and poor?

Conclusion:

Faith and trouble are like the Yin and Yang – they seem to be partners.

We should all expect to be against culture, on the outside, and having our faith and works tested continually.

But what is this trouble?

I would venture to say, the trouble in all of this is doubt.

A child-like faith is absent of doubt.

That is; we cannot afford to allow our own doubts to affect our faith.

To conclude, hear these salty words of scripture:

Romans 8:38-39

³⁸ For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Collect of the Day:

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Hymn – TIS 650

Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out for you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.
When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

Offering & Prayer of Dedication

Church News, Notices & Sharing Time

Prayers of the People & Lord's Prayer

Children's Show & Tell

Sending Forth of the People of God

Words of Mission and Sending

Exit Hymn TIS 779 – May The Feet of God

May the feet of God walk with you, and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you, and his ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you, and his breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you, and his love bring you home.