

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

**Sunday 16th September, 2018
17th 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 'Let all creation dance' (*TIS 187*)

1

Let all creation dance
in energies sublime,
as order turns with chance,
unfolding space and time,
for nature's art
in glory grows,
and newly shows
God's mind and heart.

2

God's breath each force unfurls,
igniting from a spark
expanding starry swirls,
with whirlpools dense and dark.
Though moon and sun
seem mindless things,
each orbit sings:
'Your will be done.'

3

Our own amazing earth,
 with sunlight, cloud and storms
 and life's abundant growth
 in lovely shapes and forms,
 is made for praise,
 a fragile whole,
 and from its soul
 heaven's music plays.

4

Lift heart and soul and voice:
 in Christ all praises meet
 and nature shall rejoice
 as all is made complete.
 In hope be strong,
 all life befriend
 and kindly tend
 creation's song.

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 84

**How lovely is your dwelling place,
 O Lord of hosts!
 My soul longs, indeed it faints
 for the courts of the Lord;
 my heart and my flesh sing for joy
 to the living God.**

**Even the sparrow finds a home,
 and the swallow a nest for herself,
 where she may lay her young,
 at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
 my King and my God.**

**Happy are those who live in your house,
 ever singing your praise.**

**Happy are those whose strength is in you,
 in whose heart are the highways to Zion.**

**As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.**

**O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob!
Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.**

**For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.**

**I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.**

**For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favour and honour.**

**No good thing does the Lord withhold
from those who walk uprightly.**

**O Lord of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.**

OPENING PRAYER

WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD:

SHARING THE EARLY WORD

WE SING 'Morning has broken' (*TIS 156*)

1

Morning has broken
like the first morning;
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.

Praise for the singing,
praise for the morning,
praise for them, springing
fresh from the word.

2

Sweet the rain's new fall
 sunlit from heaven,
 like the first dewfall
 on the first grass.
 Praise for the sweetness
 of the wet garden,
 sprung from completeness
 where his feet pass.

3

Mine is the sunlight;
 mine is the morning
 born of the one light
 Eden saw play.
 Praise with elation,
 praise every morning,
 God's recreation
 of the new day

NEW TESTAMENT James 3:1-12 *Taming the Tongue*

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but

no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

THE GOSPEL Mark 8: 27-38 Peter's *Declaration about Jesus*

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

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

PRAYER OF CONFESSION & WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

“Who do you say that I am?”

The way of Jesus is not easy. I'm sure we would discover this if we could ask Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was living in America during the Second World War and was safe from the evil of Nazi Germany. But as a German citizen and a man of faith, he noticed that churches in Germany were complicit in what Hitler was doing. At best, they lacked the courage to speak up against him and all he was doing. As a man who would write a famous book titled 'The cost of discipleship', he took his faith so seriously that he returned to Germany at risk of his life to try and stop Hitler and his evil ways. Bonhoeffer famously pushed Christians to look deeply into the challenge of taking up the cross of Jesus, to follow the authority of Christ rather than other powers. He even became part of a plot to assassinate Hitler, a confronting idea especially as we view it from the comfort of peace.

We hear that Jesus and the disciples are in Caesarea Philippi. They are confronted with similar things to Bonhoeffer. They are in the local area of Roman power. It is a place where Caesar was worshipped as the god of the empire. It is a place to declare your allegiance to Rome.

In that context, Jesus refers to taking up the cross. While we associate the cross with Jesus, it is important to remember it was a symbol of Roman power and authority. The cross and crucifixion was used by Rome to make people fall under her power, to comply, to stamp out any resistance. If we refer for a moment to James' reference to the tongue and controlling it, the cross had the power to make people say, 'Hail Caesar' or declare that Caesar was the son of god.

So, in this place of compliance and allegiance to Rome, Jesus asks a risky question. And Peter is at risk of his own life as he answers. 'You are the Messiah.' Perhaps that is why Jesus demands they tell no one.

Peter gets the answer right, but it is apparent he doesn't have a heart for the way of Jesus. His view is likely distorted by Rome. Caesar has power over us. He is like a god. He doesn't fail or die. So, you cannot either, Jesus.

And Jesus calls Peter out on his attitude and ideas. It is as though he reminds us like James that the tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

We will return to Jesus and Peter, but the passage from James about the power of the tongue is well timed as I reflect on my time at St. Margaret's and that it is ending. James is talking about the passing on of knowledge. As preachers and teachers, we have a responsibility to use this place (the pulpit) with caution. Rudders are small but guide great ships. James calls preachers to beware of their powers - the potential for fire and evil, as well as for good.

So as a preacher, I need to be careful to preach the Messiah as Jesus is, rather than the Messiah I want for myself (as happened for Peter). So, my task is to read and seek to understand these ancient words and try to live into them in order to deepen a sense of how they relate to our world. It is something I have sought to do faithfully, although perhaps it is easier for you to judge that than me.

Jesus invites us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

Deny ourselves: isn't this the hardest of all? It is easier to tame wild beasts than to tame the tongue or our heart or our desires. We live in a me-first world. To put ourselves first is expected, encouraged and even celebrated (at least in the West). This was true for Germany in the 1940s as well. There ordinary Germans wanted to believe they were special, chosen, stronger and better. And we are all vulnerable to this seduction. As a result, we would often rather use our powers to bend the world to what we want, than to yield to authority that asks us to deny ourselves.

Take up your cross: In the world of Jesus this means standing against the empire, against all that is evil, not be subject to its authority and

demands. This is perhaps more radical than we can imagine. It is to see the world in a totally new way. If you don't fear what Rome can do, it has no power over you. Which sounds a lot like the way Bonhoeffer lived. If you don't fear the might of Hitler, he has no power over you either.

If we interpret this for our day, what might it mean to take up our cross? What kind of a stand might we make this day against the powers and authorities that demand our compliance?

For me it is a stand for climate justice and to be a voice of dissent whenever coal or cheap electricity are offered as our saviour. It is also challenging unjust policies that allow people to rot away in offshore detention because they are political footballs rather than people loved by Jesus.

As a person of faith, I believe there is also a need to challenge our culture whenever there is a denial of what has truly happened in Australian history. And that includes criticism of Aboriginal Australians who live as though for generations they have been traumatised, because that is the truth of it. And in the name of Jesus Christ, I believe we need to stand up whenever minority peoples are scapegoated in the name of Australia. Like Asians or Muslims, or whoever we are tempted to think 'should go back home'. Love it or leave it is not an invitation into understanding or community.

And perhaps most confronting is when we are called to challenge our families on any of the issues of our day, or in the small moments of relationship, wherever the tongue is used to destroy rather than build up.

Follow Jesus: this is what it is all about, knowing that his journey to the cross cost everything, including his life. The thing is this is what truly broke the power of Rome. For if we do not recognise that Rome has authority, nothing they can do to us will matter anymore. Do we have the courage like Bonhoeffer to deny ourselves to such a degree?

My friends, as counter-intuitive as it seems, when we let go of our tongue, our wants, our desires - if we lose or deny ourselves; that is

when we find we are truly alive and can have the abundance of life that Jesus speaks about. It is about knowing who or what drives us, and how that is life in his name.

My friends, I believe I know that life, and I want that for all of us here. Who do you say that Jesus is?

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD:

WE SING 'Great is your faithfulness' (TIS 154)

1

Great is your faithfulness, O God my Father,
in you no shadow of turning we see;
you never fail and your love is unchanging:
as you have been you for ever will be.

Great is your faithfulness.

great is your faithfulness,

morning by morning new mercies we see;

all we have needed your hand has provided:

great is your faithfulness, Lord God, to me.

2

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in unspoken witness
to your great faithfulness, mercy and love.

3

Pardon for sin and a peace that's enduring,
your living presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow --
these are the blessings your love will provide.

OFFERING

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 'Take my life, and let it be' (*TIS 599*)

1

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

2

Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

3

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.

4

Take my silver and my gold,
nothing, Lord, would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use

every power as thou shalt choose.

SENDING OUT & BLESSING

SENDING OUT SONG 'Take my life, and let it be' *(continued)*

5

Take my will and make it thine;

it shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart, it is thine own;

it shall be thy royal throne.

6

Take my love: my Lord, I pour

at thy feet its treasure-store.

Take myself, and I will be

ever, only, all for thee.