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St. Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

Sunday 2nd September, 2018

15th Sunday after Pentecost – Holy Communion

Welcome

All are invited to share morning tea following the service

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD:

ACKNOWLEDGING THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS

GREETING

WE SING 'Lord of creation to you be all praise' (TIS 626)

1

Lord of creation, to you be all praise!
Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,
and yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

2

Lord of all power, I give you my will,
in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.
Your bondage is freedom; your service is song;
and, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.

3

Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind:
rich truth that surpasses our knowledge to find,
what eye has not seen and what ear has not heard
is taught by your Spirit and shines from your word.

4

Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart,
your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,
your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

5

Lord of all being, I give you my all;
 if ever I leave you I stumble and fall;
 but, led in your service your word to obey,
 I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way

CALL TO WORSHIP & OPENING PRAYER

WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD:

SHARING THE EARLY WORD *Lost Sheep, the Good Samaritan*

WE SING 'Create in us a clean heart' (TIS 712)

Create in us a clean heart, O God.
 Renew within us a right spirit.
 Cast us not away from your presence, O Lord,
 and take not your Holy Spirit from us.
 Restore to us fullness of joy,
 the joy that springs from your salvation.
 Lighten our minds, shelter our lives
 with your Spirit free.

OLD TESTAMENT READING Song of Solomon 2:8-13 *Springtime Rhapsody*

The voice of my beloved!

Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.

Look, there he stands

behind our wall,

gazing in at the windows,

looking through the lattice.

My beloved speaks and says to me:

'Arise, my love, my fair one,

and come away;

for now the winter is past,

the rain is over and gone.

The flowers appear on the earth;

the time of singing has come,

and the voice of the turtle-dove
is heard in our land.

The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.

THE GOSPEL Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 *The Tradition of the Elders*

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

"This people honours me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines."

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.' For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

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

PRAYER OF CONFESSION & WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Christ of our hearts, this is what You say and show. “Love one another, forgive forever, share everything you have and do it without a second thought, give up your life and live on.” May we walk Your way.

... I can boldly declare in the name of Jesus Christ that we are loved and forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES – Rev Arnie Wierenga

From the heart

We don't often focus on Song of Solomon, but there is a delightful and playful sense of the seasons this week as we mark the first Sunday of Spring. We hear that the face of the earth is generous, the seasons turn as they should, rains fall on time and then ease gently as flowers and fruit and fragrance burst through!

Here we are invited to imagine God as lover, passionate about the planet and besotted over us. The lover leaps over the mountains and bounds over the hills. We see a deep connection, even a dependence and harmony with the earth. All things are in order.

If only it were so for us. This week I read a news article with this shocking headline: *Climate change is World War III, and we are leaderless*. It speaks of climate change as being a war that no one is fighting in a cohesive way. At least during traditional wars ordinary people were mobilised much like the troops to do their bit towards victory. During World War II, Britons ate better food than before or after because everyone was encouraged to grow their own veggies. But in a war against climate change, that kind of mobilising or rallying is nowhere to be seen.

Australia and the US are to blame perhaps more than most. As two of the highest per capita carbon emitters, they are trading ideology for

human lives and health, according to author of that piece, David Shearman.

Our own government leaders seem quite distracted with their own affairs still, so perhaps looking at the power play in the gospel is a worthy distraction.

Jesus has another altercation with the powerful religious elite of his day, the Pharisees and the Scribes. And at first glance he seems harsh on those who call on others to wash hands before they eat. After all, today it is surely good advice. But all is not what it seems. Remember the Pharisees and Scribes had a good and privileged life. Washing hands in this moment of history was the privilege of the rich. The leaders have a go at people who can barely scrape out a living, let alone pontificate about purity laws. In part, the problem was the high tax demand imposed by Rome. If you had money, it was easier to deal with the burden of occupation. But if you had nothing, life itself was just about impossible.

Jesus is sticking up for peasant farmers when he counters the injustice and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Scribes. In a lot of ways, they were like the farmers we've been hearing about in NSW. In the context of a banking Royal Commission, it is like demanding those in drought to pay loans or taxes when there is no money coming in at all

Jesus call out the heartless and hypocritical leaders who have luxuries that ordinary battlers can only dream about. And when he speaks of the heart and what is inside, he calls them and all people towards a justice based on integrity – that is to live lives that are whole and sound.

Returning to the issue of climate change, I see trouble on the horizon, but I wish it were not so. You've probably seen (like I have) the many trucks heading north loaded to the hilt with bales of hay to feed drought affected stock. Associated with the drought, NSW has just declared the start to bush fire season a month early. And here in the Yarra Valley, my farmer friend Steve is worried there is not enough 'pick' for the spring lambs. Some describe what we have locally as a green drought – it looks good, but there is no food value in all the green. And this week the

BOM has released an outlook that says it will continue to be warm and dry over the Springtime

This all seems a long way from the playful and joyous image of God as lover in the creation. And as we welcome Spring, I'm sure we'd all like the rains to come as needed before they gently ease as the fruit abounds.

In the light of Jesus calling out those who exploit and inviting a heart for things that matter, it seems that those who are wealthy cannot ignore the exploitation of those who are struggling. And those who have stockfeed cannot ignore those who have no feed for their animals. And those who demand farmers pay loans when there is no way they can pay, cannot make demands like that anymore.

And we who are distant from the situation facing Jesus, and mostly distant from the plight of our northern farmers, are still called to integrity or wholeness in the world we inhabit. And I think that call might be summarised with these words. *Live simply so others may simply live.*

Does that mean we call to account those who use privilege over those who are struggling to make ends meet? Or perhaps our daily actions might contribute to the integrity of creation? Like buying Fairtrade products; lobbying the government about policies that impact on climate or those most affected by climate change; taking public transport whenever possible; switching to a green energy provider, even if it costs more.

Jesus had a go at the heart of those who exploited others. It seems one of the ways to see deep inside the heart, is to watch human behaviour, human actions. That is what Jesus did in relation to the Pharisees and Scribes. And our response is likewise to act in ways that celebrate the health of creation – its seasons and the wellbeing of her farmers. For our actions also speak loudly of the motivations of our heart. And to that end, this brief excerpt from 'Three Men in a Boat' by Jerome K Jerome, reminds us that one of the greatest blocks to integrity, and appreciation of creation, is our tendency to fill our lives with what we think we want, rather than what we need!

“How many people, on that voyage [up the river of life], load up the boat till it is ever in danger of swamping with a store of foolish things which they think essential to the pleasure and comfort of the trip, but which are really only useless lumber[...] Throw it overboard. It makes the boat so heavy [...] you never know a moment’s freedom from anxiety and care, never gain a moment’s rest for dreamy laziness—no time to watch the windy shadows skimming lightly o’er the shallows, or the glittering sunbeams flitting in and out among the ripples, or the great trees by the margin looking down at their own image, or the woods all green and golden.”

WE RESPOND TO GOD’S WORD:

OFFERING

During the offering WE SING ‘Touch the earth lightly’ (TIS 668)

1

Touch the earth lightly,
use the earth gently,
nourish the life of the world in our care:
gift of great wonder,
ours to surrender,
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

2

We who endanger,
who create hunger,
agents of death for all creatures that live,
we who would foster
clouds of disaster,
God of our planet, forestall and forgive!

3

Let there be greening,
birth from the burning,
water that blesses and air that is sweet,
health in God’s garden,
hope in God’s children,

regeneration that peace will complete.

4

God of all living,

God of all loving,

God of the seedling, the snow and the sun,

teach us, deflect us,

Christ re-connect us,

using us gently and making us one.

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

Season of Creation 1.

Creator of earth, sea and sky. Kindle the fire of your Spirit within us that we may be bold to heal and defend the world around us. Pour your blessings upon the people and organisations working everywhere for the good of the planet.

Breath of Life, receive our thanks for the beauty of our local habitat and all its inhabitants and lend us wisdom and will to conserve them.

May we always be in awe of the beautiful area in which we live and constantly support those in our community who work to improve the parks, gardens, lakes, vacant land, tree planting programs and rubbish removal efforts.

God, Giver of Life, hear our prayer.

Light and source of life, heal and redeem the wounds of your creation and visit the places and people which suffer from our indifference, neglect and greed.

Damage to the environment including rivers and aquifers caused by mining, which when completed is left without rehabilitation.

The theft of water by large agricultural companies in the higher reaches of waterways that deny others water at the lower reaches.

God Giver of life, hear our prayer.

Lover of all you have made, we pray for the wondrous diversity of your creatures, and we pray for their well being.

For our myriad of native birds, mammals, snakes and lizards, frogs and butterflies, insects and spiders.

God, Giver of Life, hear our prayer.

Author of the volume of creation, receive our gratitude for the places of restoration and healing and challenge us to sustain the places which feed our lives and spirits.

We pray for all who work saving endangered species, our zoos and their partners in Victoria who work to save 20 critically endangered species.

God, Giver of Life, Hear our prayer.

God, whose works are full of mystery, give us wonder and appreciation for your creatures with whom we find ourselves in conflict.

Creatures introduced into Australia by our forbears – foxes and rabbits, animals abandoned by their owners who have now turned feral and are ruining the environment - cats, wild dogs which have interbred with dingoes, pigs, deer, brumbies, donkeys, camels and goats. Cane toads, European carp which infest our waterways, starlings, sparrows and Indian mynahs.

God, Giver of life, hear our prayer.

Joy of human hearts, spread the power of your healing through our human communities, where your word is not heard and where neglect, violence, greed and warfare increase the suffering and need of people and other creatures. We pray for the millions of refugees all over the world and especially for those for whom Australia is responsible. We pray for the homeless everywhere and we give thanks for the work of Stable One and the Maroondah Churches Group who have protected the homeless with meals, accommodation, support and company every night for the last three winter months .

God, Giver of life, hear our prayer.

Restore and sustain those of this congregation who desire or need your particular compassion. For those who have needed to find a new place to live, for those who have recently been in hospital and for those recovering from surgery.

God Giver of life, hear our prayers. Amen.

THE SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION:

QUESTIONS OF INSTITUTION

What is this meal of bread and wine?

Why do we eat bread?! !!

What does the wine help us remember?

... Your presence in a loaf of bread. **Your presence in a simple cup.**
Remember me, Jesus said, **and we remember.**

GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

... The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving continues, all singing:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed, is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

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.**

WE SING 'Bread for the world' (ATW 473, Bernadette Farrell)

Bread for the world:

a world of hunger.

Wine for all peoples:

people who thirst.

May we who eat

be bread for others.

May we who drink

pour out our love.

1. Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the bread of life,
broken to reach
and heal the wounds
of human pain.
Where we divide your people,
you are waiting there
on bended knee
to wash our feet with endless care.

2. Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the wine of peace,
poured into hearts once broken
and where dryness sleeps.
Where we are tired and weary,
you are waiting there
to be the way which beckons us
beyond despair.

3. Lord Jesus Christ,
you call us to your feast,
at which the rich and pow'rful
have become the least.
Where we survive on others
in our human greed,
you walk among us
begging for your ev'ry need.

BREAKING THE BREAD

... Let us receive what we are; Let us become what we receive.

The body of Christ.

THE COMMUNION

SHARING FROM THE CHILDREN

SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

WE SING TIS 687 'God gives us a future'

1

God gives us a future,
daring us to go
into dreams and dangers
on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow

in the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us,
for new life starts now.

2

We must leave behind us
sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning
is a better way.

Fear and doubt and habit
must not hold us back:
God gives hope, and insight,
and the strength we lack.

3

Holy Spirit, teach us
how to read the signs,
how to meet the challenge
of our troubled times.

Love us into action,
stir us into prayer,
till we choose God's life, and
find our future there.

SENDING OUT & BLESSING