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St Margaret's Uniting Church
Mooroolbark
Sept 23rd 2018

THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE

Please stand as the Bible is carried into the church.

Greeting: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you

Hymn: 98 We praise, we worship you, O God

1

We praise, we worship you, O God,
your sovereign power we sound abroad;
all nations bow before your throne,
and you the Lord eternal own.

2

Loud hallelujahs to your name
the angels and all hosts proclaim;
by all the powers and thrones in heaven
unceasing praise to you is given.

3

O holy, holy, holy Lord,
the God of hosts, by all adored,
through heaven and earth your creatures see
the glory of your majesty.

4

Apostles join the glorious throng
and swell the loud triumphant song;

enraptured prophets hear the sound
and spread the hallelujahs round.

5

Victorious martyrs join their praise
and shout the omnipotence of grace,
while all the church throughout the earth
acknowledge and extol your worth.

6

Glory to you, O God most high!
Father, we praise your majesty:
the Son, the Spirit we adore
Creator, Saviour, Comforter

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Hymn 1 (Psalm 1) Happy are they who walk in God's wise way

1

Happy are they who walk in God's wise way;
happy who shun the sinful choice:
happy who find their pleasure in God's law,
happy who heed God's righteous voice.

2

Theirs is the life where duty and delight
nourish each other blissfully;
as when beside a broad and generous stream
proudly stands ever green the tree.

3

Fretful and anxious are the sinners' days,
barren and lonely is their path;
like wind on dust the judgment of the Lord
scatters their pride in sudden wrath.

4

Lord, in your mercy spare me, keep me still;
let me not choose the sinner's way.
Promise and law you equally have given:
let them be my delight today.

EARLY WORD- 'The Bible'

What is this large book in the middle of the worship space? The Bible.

When we brought it in we all stood up because it is so important.

It is the record of the written word of God.

We gather around it, we read from it and we listen to what it says to us today.

After our worship we follow it out into the world to be our guide for this week.

- Quiz:
- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| 1. | How many books in the Bible? | 66 |
| 2. | What is the name of the first book in the Bible? | Genesis |
| 3. | How many Gospels are there? | 4 |

There are all sorts of books in this library called the Bible.

There are history books, poetry books, (we will hear a wonderful poem shortly), books of law, letters. There are love stories, war stories, adventure stories, stories about giants, sea creatures, and shipwrecks; there are travel stories, true stories and pretend stories.

The first 39 are called the Old Testament.

It is the story of God and God's people, the "children of Israel".

The beginning of the New Testament has the four Gospels.

They tell the BEST STORY OF ALL.

It is the story of Jesus, God who came to this world and lived here as a man. It tells about his life, his death and his resurrection.

Then the New Testament tells about the Holy Spirit and the new people of God, the Christian Church.

That is where we come in!!

We read the Bible to learn about the love of God in Jesus.

Each time we read, God can speak to us through the words.

After his resurrection, Jesus, himself, explained the scripture to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:32

During worship each Sunday, in the sermon, the preacher explains what has been read. Then it is up to us to respond to God's Word.

The more we learn about the Bible, the more we read or listen, the better we can understand what God is wanting us to do. If you want to start reading the Bible, begin with the Gospel of Mark.

Hymn God has given us a book full of stories

God has given us a book full of stories,
which was made for the people of old,
it begins with the tale of a garden,
and it ends with the city of gold.

But the best is the story of Jesus,
of the babe with the ox in the stall,
of the song that was sung by the angels,
the most beautiful story of all.

There are stories for parents and children,
for the old who are ready to rest,
but for all who can read them or listen
the story of Jesus is best.

For it tells how he came from the Father,
the far-away children to call,
to bring the lost sheep to their shepherd,
the most beautiful story of all.

Old Testament - Proverbs 31: 10-31 Ode to a Capable Wife

A capable wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.
The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.
She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.
She is like the ships of the merchant,
she brings her food from far away.
She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household
and tasks for her servant-girls.
She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
She girds herself with strength,

and makes her arms strong.
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.
She opens her hand to the poor,
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
She is not afraid for her household when it snows,
for all her household are clothed in crimson.
She makes herself coverings;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
Her husband is known in the city gates,
taking his seat among the elders of the land.
She makes linen garments and sells them;
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
She looks well to the ways of her household,
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up and call her happy;
her husband too, and he praises her:
'Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.'
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Gospel - Mark 9: 30-37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them,

‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’

For the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Sermon

Mark 9:37 “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me.”

The Powerful and the Powerless.

1. The Power and the Glory.

The Gospel reading today reminds us that God is present among us in Jesus who says that he will be rejected by people and killed because he does not measure up to their expectations. He does not pursue their plans, but follows the plan of God. He accepts being lowly, a servant, even a slave because that is how God wants to be in this world. That is quite different from the thinking of people then and now.

We use terms like “God Almighty”, and somehow expect Jesus to act for us in an ‘Almighty’ way. In his predictions of his sufferings and death he rejects that way. There is no hype, no glitz, no gold medals: there is to be a cross where he offers his life to and for us all.

That is what leads one commentator to remark: “God’s world and man’s world remain separate. If faith comes at all, it will only be as an absolute and incomprehensible divine miracle” (Schweizer.p.191) Big words for a small and fragile thing like faith?

Yet some have recognized in the presence of Jesus as a lowly, humble person, the very presence of God in our midst:

Paul wrote to the Philippians: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross....” (Phil. 2:5-8)

This is precisely the one who ‘was teaching his disciples, saying to them. “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.’ (Mark 9:31,32)

Why were they afraid to ask him? Maybe they remembered that Peter had rebuked Jesus for saying this at Caesarea Philippi and Peter earned the rebuke “Get behind me Satan” and they did not want that kind of argument with Jesus. Mark tells the Gospel story with the blindness of the disciples as a kind of highlight, not singling one person out, but saying in effect that they were a pool of ignorance.

We see that in what happens next.

2. The Place of Precedence.

‘When they were in the house’ that is, away from the public, the crowd, Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about on the way. “But they were silent, for on the way they argued with one another as to who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first of all must be last of all and servant of all.”

There is precedence, there is a first place in the sight of God.

But it is not where we would look for it, not where we would expect it.

The one who is prepared to accept being last, the one who is prepared to serve others, that one is first in the sight of God.

Is it possible for a CEO to be a humble person, not haughty, but open, accessible, serving others that all together they might serve the community/ the organization/ the common good?

Paul was writing to a gathering of Christians in the great city of Corinth and he reminds them: “Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were

wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God". (1Cor.1:26-29)

Thus power and precedence in the affairs of people cannot be carried over in the life of the disciples. Their function, their purpose, their whole aim in life, their final goal, is really to serve both God and others.

We have to confess that this is not reflected widely in the history of the Church. Certainly there are exceptions like Francis and Mother Teresa, who were both humble and assertive (but then, so was Jesus!).

People, whether 'powerful' or not, are open to the temptation to put other people down in an attempt to get priority. Jesus is never into that business. True greatness is not about having power over others.

Greatness is being a loving and serving person: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45)

The Gospel turns things on their head. It claims that power which commands others is not true greatness. Power which serves others, not lauding it over them, is the real thing. Do not get swept away with all the trappings of human glory. The laurel wreaths wither, the gold tarnishes, the memory fails. The heroes are replaced by successive generations of younger, stronger, faster athletes or footballers.

So we can delight in them, when they achieve their best and the games' best, and the world's best. But they can be the ultimate just for a season or two. There is only one Ultimate who endures forever.

3. A Child in Community.

'Then he took a child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcome me welcomes not me but the one who sent me".' (Mark 9: 36,37)

We should not be overcome by sentimentality when Jesus uses the world 'child' even though other sayings will spell out more fully what aspects of childhood Jesus saw as models for his disciples.

Here we may see that Jesus is using the 'child' as a symbol for an insignificant person, a vulnerable person, a small, weak, powerless person who should be welcomed into the community; for the child is set in the midst of the disciples. Note that the disciples had just been arguing about who was the greatest. They have been told that the first must be last of all and servant of all. Children and servants had no status, no power, no achievements. They were literally the last of all.

'Children, little ones' should be welcomed to the community of the disciples, "in my name". There is power in that name, the power of acceptance, the power of love, the power of life together. The name of Jesus binds us into one fellowship where age, gender, class, race, speech, strength and wealth have no dividing power for he brings us together and gives us to one another.

To welcome another in the name of Jesus is really to welcome Jesus into our midst. To welcome Jesus is to welcome the one who sent him, it is to accept God. So what may appear to begin as a social action, is in fact like the Peace we pass in our worship service.

It is a greeting and an acceptance of one another in the name of Christ. Jesus at times called his disciples 'my children' or 'my little ones': grown men, fishermen, tax collectors, patriots, all one in the fellowship of Jesus, all to receive his nurture, his care, his life. All to accept and care for one another. Mark began his episode with Jesus foretelling his sufferings and death: saying in effect that the cross would be the revelation of the power of God in utter weakness. It is the showing of the richness of God in what is ultimate poverty (you can't get poorer than a crucified criminal).

Mark is telling us that Jesus makes this revelation to a group of men who did not understand and who immediately began to flex their muscles at each other to see who was the greatest. They were intensely interested in power.

*Through his words and deeds Jesus tried to lead them to open their arms to the weak, the defenceless, the insignificant people in their midst.
What would happen if the Church could begin to think and act in this way.
What if we really thought of greatness in Jesus' way, of welcoming, accepting and loving? (Including refugees)*

Maybe we would truly understand what he means when he says "you are not far from the kingdom of God".

Prayer: Father in heaven, Creator of all, look upon your people in their moments of need, for you alone are the source of our peace. Bring us to the dignity which distinguishes the poor in spirit, and show us how great is the call to serve, that we may share in the peace of Christ who offered his life in the service of all. We ask in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE

Hymn: 691 Faith will not grow from words alone

1

Faith will not grow from words alone,
from proofs provided, scripture known;
our faith must feel its way about,
and live with question-marks and doubt.

2

The pattern Jesus showed, we share:
life comes through death, hope through despair.
God is made known in brokenness,
and faith feeds on God's emptiness.

3

The church still tells how Jesus came
through death to glorious life again --
the strangest story! Yet, maybe,
our faith will thrive on mystery.

4

Faith takes the little that we know,
and calls for hope, and tells us: Go!
Love and take courage, come what may;
Christ will be with us on the way.

Offering
Dedication prayer and Journey song
Congregational life
Prayers of the people and Lord's Prayer:

SENDING OUT OF THE PEOPLE

Children's "Show and Tell"

Hymn 215 You servants of God

1

You servants of God,
your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad
his wonderful name;
the name all-victorious
of Jesus extol;
his kingdom is glorious,
and rules over all.

2

Our God rules on high,
almighty to save;
and still he is nigh,
his presence we have;
the great congregation
his triumph shall sing,
ascribing salvation
to Jesus our king.

3

Salvation to God,
who sits on the throne!
let all cry aloud,
and honour the Son:
the praises of Jesus
the angels proclaim,
fall down on their faces,
and worship the Lamb.

4

Then let us adore,
and give him his right,
all glory and power,
all wisdom and might,
all honour and blessing,
with angels above,
and thanks never-ceasing,
and infinite love.

Benediction