

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

Sunday 7th October, 2018

**20th Sunday after Pentecost – Holy Communion
Celebrating 50 years of ordination – Rev. Franklyn Parrent**

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 all hopefulness' (*TIS 613*)

1

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
be there at our waking and give us, we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

2

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

3

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

4

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,

be there at our sleeping and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

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 *Lost Sheep, Jesus and the children*

WE SING 'Faith hope and love' (ATOK 376)

Faith, hope and love – this is what we long for,
Faith, hope and love – this is what we need.
Faith, hope and love – this is what we cry for,
Oh teach us how to live.

Trust in the truth – this is what we long for,
Trust in the truth – this is what we need.
Trust in the truth – this is what we cry for,
Oh teach us how to live.

Patience within – this is what we long for,
Patience within – this is what we need.
Patience within – this is what we cry for,
Oh teach us how to live.

Freedom for all – this is what we long for,
Freedom for all – this is what we need.
Freedom for all – this is what we cry for,
Oh teach us how to live.

Faith, hope and love – this is what we long for,
Faith, hope and love – this is what we need.
Faith, hope and love – this is what we cry for,
Oh teach us how to live.

THE GOSPEL Mark 10:2-16

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.' But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

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

PRAYER OF CONFESSION & WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

... your sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

The things we learn as a child frame our adult living. And often what we learn early make life hard for us as we grow up.

I learnt that divorce was wrong, that marriage was a life-long thing and I believed up until recently that I would never be among those who got divorced.

But we don't always get what we imagine or wish for. As divorce became an unwelcome and painful guest, so my childhood ideals need shifting in order to make sense of what life had thrown at me.

But it's not just ideas about divorce. Over my growing years I've also witnessed a world of change. In many ways the older we are the less equipped we are for those changes. Technology seems foreign let alone politics, a growing and changing population, or once comfortable cultural norms. I also grew up in days when Tasmania weather was cold, cool or at best temperate. In the daily forecast I see a climate I no longer recognise from those early days.

When I despair that adults of our world cannot see or change or respond to issues like climate change, I look to what the children are doing. And there I find hope, because they are being formed in today's world compared to the one we, who are older, once knew. Their attitudes towards climate change will impact the world, once given the chance to lead in our place.

And when I'm confronted with the dissonance of change, I look to Jesus in order discern what God might require of us today. So, what would Jesus do ... in all that is new and changing? It is challenging to find simple answer to things he didn't encounter, but there are some clues in the Scriptures.

In what we've heard today, we find many challenges from Mark's gospel. Some Pharisees come to test Jesus. 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'

In this I can see the sensibilities that formed me as a child. *Divorce is a bad thing. It undermines the desire and purpose of God. God has made us male and female and a man and a woman shall be joined as one flesh. What God has joined together, let no one separate!*

That seems pretty clear, doesn't it? I get why I held my strong view on marriage and divorce. It also explains the life-long struggle to work out how to respond to same-sex attracted people, a struggle of the Uniting

Church. It seems Jesus has told us what he would do and therefore what we should do ...

Except things that once seemed clear are really not so.

We need to ask some questions. Does the context make a difference? Some Pharisees come to test him, to trap him, and he is responding to any who would seek to justify their own position. Is the stuff of marriage and divorce the same as we understand it, or have there been changes over history and among cultures? Does Jesus condemn those who are victims of divorce, or even those who are same-sex attracted?

I guess when you grow up believing in simple ideals that don't match the reality of life, it forces a deeper look into what Jesus is saying. As a person of faith, I have searched my soul and struggled to discover anew what is just and has integrity as I follow Jesus. It has forced me into a new place of love and compassion for all who are broken by life, and all who are in need of God's sanctuary and salvation. In fact it is for me and for these that Jesus came.

Elsewhere Jesus says those who are not broken have no need of him. But if we are honest, aren't we all broken in varying degrees? It doesn't require divorce to break us, although that might be a sign of it. Life and relationships and prejudice and pain and hatred and violence all take their toll in varying degrees. I suspect Jesus comes for all of us who are honest that we need some extra love, life and salvation.

The Pharisees seem to think they are beyond this need and in their folly try to trap Jesus. They don't care for the issue of divorce except as a weapon against him. They pick divorce because it's a hot issue. John the Baptist has criticised Herod for divorcing his wife and unlawfully marrying his sister-in-law. Herod has discarded his wife like she is yesterday's fashion. It is a question of power and privilege and the injustice that occurs when people are so easily trashed.

Jesus needs to tread carefully. So he calls out what he sees. Speaking of Moses' law on divorce, Jesus says: 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you.' And he pushes the point as

he talks about motive and consequence. Effectively he says that marriage is not to be entered into lightly nor abandoned at a whim. If you want an easy out then you will be judged for it. But at the heart of it the issue appears to be about self-centred desire that is heartless and unjust towards the other. And Jesus is also radical in the way he speaks about women. It was only men who had the say on divorce. So he pushes them. If men can divorce women, then women can also divorce men. See how that sits with hard-hearted power brokers!

But what Jesus says is also much bigger than marriage. It is about all of our relationships, and not just other intimate ones like de facto or same sex unions. As Jesus says just two chapters later in this gospel: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’*

So what would Jesus do?

It seems the answer is not so much about divorce or even gender. The answer is about how we care for someone else, how we care for our neighbour, remembering that everyone is our neighbour. In the world of Jesus, all deserve the love of God and we are expected to bear and witness to that love in all our relationships.

Think about your actions towards another person, Jesus says. If you treat them well, in love and with justice and compassion, then that is what you do to me. If you cause them to stumble, or vilify them, or withdraw love from them, then it is like you’ve done that to me.

As I thank you for your love and care for both me and Jennie as our previous marriages disintegrated and we found life together, I wonder if that same kind of love and care might be found for others who struggle to find love and acceptance in our world today? At the moment the church council is having an important conversation. It is in response to the Uniting Church Assembly clearing the way for ministers to conduct same sex marriages. For some among us, it is an idea too far from what we learnt as children. But if Jesus is talking of love, justice and

compassion rather than the nuts and bolts of marriage and gender, I wonder what his response might be?

I wonder if it might echo the Uniting Church where we have said that we can uphold and believe two views on marriage, because that represents the diversity of who we are.

Jesus finishes the conversation by inviting the children to come and saying that the kingdom of God belongs to them. Children are open to what is possible and may well bear the light of Christ to us who are older and more set in our ways, if we care to look.

So let us allow the children to shine the light of Christ upon us. May we be moved and open to the love, compassion and justice of God shown us through Jesus. Let's be open to seeing things in the way of Christ as we strive to love God and love our neighbour.

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD:

OFFERING - *WE SING 'What a friend we have in Jesus' (TIS 590)*

1

What a friend we have in Jesus
 all our sins and griefs to bear,
 what a privilege to carry
 everything to God in prayer:
 O what peace we often forfeit,
 O what needless pain we bear,
 all because we do not carry
 everything to God in prayer.

2

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.

3

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 your 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.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE – including celebration of 50 years ordination

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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 'Come to the banquet' (ATW 475)

Come to the banquet there's a place for you!
Though you maybe have no money,
though you maybe feel unworthy,
in your strength and in your weakness
you are welcome, come.

See, you are an honoured guest,
from constant serving you may rest;
so sit you down, be fed and blessed,
for you are welcome, come.

Whether you've been lost or faithful,
whether you've been wise or wasteful,
here's a place of rest and grace,
and you are welcome, come!

Willing hands have made this bread
with yeast and salt and labour shared.
Let all the hungry ones be fed.
It's time for feasting, come.

Abundant wine, enough for all!
Our generous, loving host has called.
The cup of blessing now is poured
for sweet communion, come.

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 'Kneels at the feet of his friends' (TIS 640)

1

Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet:
master who acts as a slave to them.

*Yesu, Yesu,
fill us with your love,
show us how to serve
the neighbours we have from you.*

2

Neighbours are wealthy and poor,
varied in colour and race,
neighbours are near us and far away.

3

These are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love;
all these are neighbours to us and you.

4

Loving puts us on our knees,
silently washing their feet,
this is the way we should live with you.

SENDING OUT & BLESSING

SENDING OUT SONG 'Jesus loves me' (TIS 229)

[1]

Jesus loves me, this I know,
and the Bible tells me so,

little ones to him belong,
in his love we shall be strong

[chorus]

*Yes, Jesus loves me,
yes, Jesus loves me,
yes, Jesus loves me,
the Bible tells me so.*

[3]

Jesus loves me, still today,
walking with me on my way,
wanting as a friend to give
light and love to all who live