

The Service of the Lord's Day

Saint Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

4th November 2018 - Pentecost 26

Worship lead by Rev Dr. Barry Brown

Theme: We are not alone!

We Gather to Worship God

[Please stand as the Bible is carried in to commence Worship]

WE SING "*We praise, we worship you, O God*" TiS 98

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.

GREETING and CALL TO WORSHIP

PRAYERS OF ADORATION and CONFESSION, concluding:

***Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,***

***have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name.***

WORD'S DECLARING GOD'S FORGIVING GRACE

We Listen to God's Word:

AN EARLY WORD WITH THE CHILDREN

WE SING *"Nothing is lost on the breath of God..."*

Nothing is lost on the breath of God,
nothing is lost forever,
God's breath is love,
and that love will remain,
holding the world forever.
No feather too light,
no hair too fine,
no flower too brief in its glory,
no drop in the ocean,
no dust in the air,
but is counted and told in God's story.

Nothing is lost to the eyes of God,
nothing is lost forever,
God sees with love,
and that love will remain,
holding the world forever.
No journey too far,
no distance too great,
no valley of darkness too blinding;
no creature too humble,
no child too small for God to be seeking and finding.

Nothing is lost to the heart of God,
nothing is lost for ever;
God's heart is love,
and that love will remain,
holding the world forever.
No impulse of love,
no office of care,
no moment of life in its fullness;
no beginning too late,
no ending too soon,
but is gathered and known in its goodness.

THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES – Isaiah 25:6 – 9

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. {7} And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. {8} Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. {9} It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

THE GOSPEL READING – Mark 12:28 – 34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" {29} Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; {30} 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.' {31} The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." {32} Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; {33} and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbour as oneself,'--this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." {34} When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

We are not alone !

[The following is a précis of a more detailed and nuanced sermon preached on the Sunday next after All Saints Day 2018].

Last week I read a small book that had been suggested to me by a member of this congregation – ***The End of Preaching***, by Thomas H Troeger. At first glance the title seems to suggest that preaching, as a mode of communication, has lost its usefulness. However, this is not what the book is about. The title echoes remarks made by a famous preacher, in a lecture given back in 1872. 'The end' of preaching here means the *intent* or the *purpose* of any sermon. It is a reminder that when one sets out to craft a sermon a key part of the discipline is to have a clear *intent*, or *purpose* in front of mind.

The purpose that I had in front of my mind in preparing today's sermon (indeed, in preparing the whole of this service of Christian worship), was to stress that ***We are not alone on our journey as Christians***. We are part of a huge crowd encompassing centuries – edging each other on...

Hebrews 12:1 – 3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

The word 'Therefore' refers to the list of men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 – These forebears as exemplars of the Faith. Earliest forebears to Noah; from Sarah & Abraham to Joseph; from Moses through the leaders of Israel; the prophets & martyrs of Israel; and the more recent faithful Christian saints & martyrs.

The imagery of this verse is that of an athlete running a course and pushing against the odds. The cloud of witnesses are not just onlookers, but those who have themselves previously completed their course. So they are not an ordinary cheering crowd of supporter, they represent those who have been there are now know the satisfaction of having completed their course.

Those still facing the struggle of the course before them are edged on to persevere and to endure. They are to throw off anything that hinders their striving.

But mostly they are to "Look (away) to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." Jesus is one of us – an exemplar of suffering and endurance, and the end-prize is the joy of being in the presence of God with Jesus. For it is through his endurance, his bearing of the shame of the cross, that we are enabled to gain the victory – to stand with him on the winner's block.

Invictus

A little over a week ago Australia was host to the Invictus Games. I found it very moving and inspiring to watch the variously wounded competitors strive to give their best to participate in and, if possible, win their events. And there were many images of endurance, and also selfless support. Remember one wheel chair competitor pushing another across the winning line; and one man pausing to comfort and encourage another when traumatized by a helicopter overhead – a reminder of painful war experiences.

However, alongside the inspiration of these games, I could not help but feel somewhat discomfited by the Logo that was frequently emblazoned across the TV screen:

Invictus: I AM the master of my fate
I AM the captain of my soul.

'Invictus' is the name of a poem, written by William Ernest Henley in 1875. The words "*I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul*" are the closing sentences of that now well-known poem.

The poem is intended to encourage those striving against the odds, and to celebrate the strength of the human spirit. And in this sense, the poem with its title and words has made a valuable contribution to the purpose and character of the Invictus Games.

However, I make two comments. First, these words are not entirely true. The wounded service men and women had been wounded in conflicts not of their making; and the 'fate' of many had been determined, and continues to be determined to a large extent, by factors beyond their control. I will not stress this point too much as I do not wish to diminish the inspiration of the men and women whose bravery and endurance was so evident in those great games. But also because my second point is more important.

So, second: The TV Logo was constructed in a particular way. The CAPITALIZED letters 'I AM' were derived from the words *Invictus GAMES* and the capitalization of **I AM** was applied to the last words of the poem: I AM the master of my fate; I AM the captain of my soul. Now, we within the Judeo – Christian tradition are probably well aware that the words 'I AM' (short for I AM who I AM) represent the holy name of God. And Christians will be aware that in John's Gospel Jesus identifies himself with this holy name – I AM the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, etc.

And it is relevant to remember that as Christians we are called upon NOT to be the masters of our fate or captains of our souls. In our UCA Covenant Service we declare that Christ alone is our master and captain: "*To take this yoke upon us means that we are content that he appoint us our place and work, and that he himself be our reward.*"

Please understand that I am not belittling the Invictus Games – I found them to be inspiring and profoundly moving. The point that I am making is that what distinguishes the endurance and the race we are called to participate in is that we neither run for our own cause, nor in our own strength alone. We are not the Master or the Captain; Christ is. We are not the prize. And, importantly, **we are not alone...**

Today we are reflecting on the theme of ALL SAINTS, which reflects ALL SAINTS DAY on 1st November. Let me remind you that a saint, in the Biblical sense, is not just one of the high profile persons in the Christian story. It is the term used to describe those who are 'holy' or 'apart' not because they are better than others, but because they have been made distinct through their calling in Jesus Christ. Remember how Paul, in his letters, referred to "the saints who are at...Rome, Corinth, Ephesus...".

It might seem strange to some that as a Republican (in the Australian context), I still like to watch documentaries and TV programs about the British royals. I wonder how many of you watch the weddings of William and Kate, Harry and Megan, and more recently Eugenie and Jack. I also wonder if you noticed that none of the brides 'tossed their bouquets' to the crowd. This was because they followed the tradition started by the Queen of having the bride's flowers

taken to Westminster Abbey and placed on 'The tomb of the unknown soldier.' This tomb, like many tombs named the same, represents the ordinary soldiers whose lives were lost and who have no grave, no known place of honour or remembrance.

'All Saints' is a celebration and commemoration of the countless saints of God who have no statue, no marked tomb, no story remembered. We have churches and cathedrals named after some of the 'big-name' saints. Next Sunday week we will commemorate Saint Margaret of Scotland, after whom this church is named. During 2018 I've mentioned the significant anniversaries of two martyr-saints: Martin Luther King Jr (martyred 1968); Elizabeth of Russia (martyred 1918). Probably some, like me, can call to mind some significant 'saint' whose life has inspired us. However, All Saints is about the ordinary folk who, as followers of Christ, have run their race and completed their course. Today is about them.

About a month ago I went on a historical tour of a synagogue and two churches in East Melbourne. In the East Melbourne Hebrew Synagogue, at the entrance, is a large board displaying the names of family members who have died in the Jewish Faith. On the anniversary of their death a light above the name appears in commemoration.

Today, we are invited to light a candle of commemoration. It may represent a particular person, or a number of people. For example, today I will light a candle and remember my great grandmother Mary Ann Mullen, a dedicated Christian woman, who 100 years ago this coming week would have been pleased to see the end of The Great War, but with the deep sadness of having lost two sons killed in action. Hugh Mullen was fatally wounded at Gallipoli, and David in Belgium. I will also remember my first Sunday School teacher, who happened to have the very ordinary name, Jack Robinson.

I close by quoting from a poem by Peter Kocan – 'Blackout'. It was not specifically written for such an occasion, but its words are deeply relevant:

My candle has glimmered for an hour
And longer since the switch's mutiny.
Its ancient light, mysterious and pure,
Has shone a message. And it seems to say
I need not fear, need not be lonely, lost,
That I am not abandoned in the dark
While there is something links me with the vast
And silent congregation stretching back-

All those anonymous men and women
Whose times and trials are forgotten now,
But who with unsung gallantry held on
And kept their vigil in a frail glow.
I can see them, ages before my birth,
Gathered around the one wick of truth.

AND OUR TEXT (Hebrew 12:1 – 2):

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

We are not alone !

We Respond to God's Word:

WE SING "*Rejoice in God's saints, today and...*" TiS 470

1

Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days:
a world without saints forgets how to praise.

Their faith in acquiring the habit of prayer,
their depth of adoring, Lord, help us to share.

2

Some march with events to turn them God's way;
some need to withdraw, the better to pray;
some carry the gospel through fire and through flood:
our world is their parish; their purpose is God.

3

Rejoice in those saints, unpraised and unknown,
who bear someone's cross, or shoulder their own;
they shame our complaining, our comforts, our cares:
what patience in caring, what courage, is theirs!

4

Rejoice in God's saints, today and all days:
a world without saints forgets how to praise.
In loving, in living, they prove it is true:
their way of self-giving, Lord, leads us to you

LIGHTING CANDLES OF REMEMBRANCE

THE OFFERING is gathered and Dedicated in Prayer

THE NOTICES and CHURCH NEWS

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

The Sacrament of The Lord's Supper

THE INVITATION and DIRECTIONS

THE PEACE [The People stand as they are able]

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

[Please 'Pass the Peace' with one or two others]

WE SING "*Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast*" TiS 545

1

Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast;
Heaven's own fare has fed the last and least;
Christ's own peace is shared again on earth;
God the Spirit fills us with new worth.

2

No more doubting, no more senseless dread:
God's good self has graced our wine and bread;
all the wonder heaven has kept in store.
now is ours to keep for evermore.

3

Celebrate with saints who dine on high,
witnesses that love can never die.
'Hallelujah!' - thus their voices ring:
nothing less in gratitude we bring.

4

Praise the Maker, praise the Maker's Son,
praise the Spirit - three yet ever one;
praise the God whose food and friends avow
heaven starts here! The kingdom beckons now!

THE SETTING OF THE TABLE

THE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING [including]:

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.

[After a time of further prayers]:

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place
joining with choirs of angels and the
whole creation in the eternal hymn:

***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.***

[Following a time of further prayers]: ***Amen.***

THE LORD'S PRAYER [ELLC] English Language Liturgical Consultation

***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.***

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD.

THE MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION:

Christ has died, Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

Blessing and honour, glory and power
Are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

THE COMMUNION [please move forward as you are able]

PRAYERS AFTER COMMUNION.

The Sending Forth of the People of God

WORDS OF MISSION, BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:
In the name of Christ. Amen.

WE SING "For all the saints..." TiS 455 [Verses 1 – 4, 8]

1

For all the saints who from their labours rest,
who to the world their Lord by faith confessed,
your name, O Jesus, be for ever blessed.
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

2

You were their rock, their fortress and their might,
you were their captain in the well fought fight,
in deepest darkness still their one true light.

3

So may your servants, faithful, true and bold,
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
and win, with them, the victor's crown of gold.

4

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine,
all yours, all joined in unity divine.

8

From earth's wide bounds and ocean's farthest shore,
through heaven's gate the holy people pour;
the Three-in-One for ever they adore.

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