

Mooroolbark Uniting Church

Sunday 13 January, 2019



Now, Then, Future

Rev Ric Holland

Words of welcome and introduction Rev Ric

Lighting of Christ candle

Hymn

Tune: Lasst Uns Erfreuen 88.88 and Hallelujahs TIS 72

From all who dwell below the skies,
let the Creator's praise arise; *Hallelujah!*
Let the Redeemer's name be sung
through every land, by every tongue, *Hallelujah!*

Eternal are your mercies, Lord,
eternal truth attends your word: *Hallelujah!*
Your praise shall sound from shore to shore
till suns shall rise and set no more. *Hallelujah!* *Isaac Watts*

Prayers

The peace & community news

Young people

Hymn

Tune: Maccabeus 10 11.11 11 and refrain TIS 380

Hope is forever; it will never end;
Like the rainbow – ageless; we can't comprehend;
Like the mountains – matchless; as a trusted friend;

Like the ocean – boundless; on it we depend.
Hope is forever; like the rising sun;
Always brings new promise; light to everyone.

Hope is elusive when we're feeling low;
Dark clouds are depressing; life has lost its glow;
Duty can be pressing; pulls like undertow;
Hope then brings a blessing; joy can overflow.
Hope is forever; like the rising sun;
Always brings new promise; light to everyone.

Hope in the future; God is always there
In love and compassion, and with more to spare;
Love that has no ration, for all, everywhere;
This was Jesus' passion, shown in love and care.
Hope is forever; like the rising sun;
Always brings new promise; light to everyone. *George Stuart*

Bible readings from "The Messenger" version

Isaiah 58: 6-8 "This is the kind of fast day I'm after:
to break the chains of injustice,
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
free the oppressed, cancel debts.
What I'm interested in seeing you do is:
sharing your food with the hungry,
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
being available to your own families.

Psalm 112 Hallelujah!

Blessed man, blessed woman, who fear GOD,
Who cherish and relish his commandments,
Their children robust on the earth,
And the homes of the upright—how blessed!
Their houses brim with wealth
And a generosity that never runs dry.
Sunrise breaks through the darkness for good people—
God's grace and mercy and justice!
The good person is generous and lends lavishly;
No shuffling or stumbling around for this one,
But a sterling and solid and lasting reputation.

Unfazed by rumour and gossip,
Heart ready, trusting in GOD,
Spirit firm, unperturbed,
Ever blessed, relaxed among enemies,
They lavish gifts on the poor—
A generosity that goes on, and on, and on.
An honoured life! A beautiful life!
Someone wicked takes one look and rages,
Blusters away but ends up speechless.
There's nothing to the dreams of the wicked. Nothing.

Address - **Now, Then, Future**

As a church we need to rise to the occasion.

We cannot just muddle through. The Presbytery Statement of Feb 2015 “Recognition that circumstances may change” and that we must have an “openness to new and different ways to love and serve God”. This is not a new phenomenon. Prof Robin Gill Emeritus Prof at Canterbury University UK is studying the history of the church over centuries demonstrates in his theses “The Empty Church” that the peak of traditional church attendance in the Western world was 1851 which coincides exactly with the massive growth in church buildings. So when the church was beginning its congregation decline at the same time it was expanding its building program. Some research in Australia quotes an example in Bendigo and Ballarat where there were more seats in the combined churches than there were actual people living in those communities!

In the Uniting Church we've been very good at 'tinkering' or just addressing immediate crisis slowly but in a totally disorganised way, with not a lot of thought given to “mission” or long term strategy.

Story: Man on train from Kings Cross.

NOW: So the church has done a little bit here and an adjustment there, and effectively just moved on to the next crisis which would be similarly dealt with on a piecemeal basis... close this church down, amalgamate that one, continue to have a Minister as long as we can... and in all that losing sight of our central task: “The sharing and the celebration of the Good News of Jesus Christ”.

I once asked a chairperson of a church council when I as a visiting preacher “What was his vision for his church” So long as it sees me out!!!

THEN: Don't get me wrong, I am proud to be part of a church which through the centuries has risen to the occasion and through which huge steps forward have been made education and the development of schooling for all, hospitals and the introduction of nursing care, trade unionism fighting for the rights of ordinary working people, social and community services providing support and care for the most vulnerable, social justice in the prison and penal system, care for the old and dying these were all begun by the church as it sought to demonstrate the Kingdom of God in a world of suffering, neglect and pain.

But whilst we acknowledge the past achievements of the church we must also accept the mistakes that have been made as the institution of the church seeks to protect itself. We are a long way from the early disciples who were barefoot preachers when even the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head (Luke 9 57-58).

Over the centuries we have physically and metaphorically created structures that in many ways have kept people out rather than included them in. e.g. the early missionary church in Africa who met in the open air surrounded by the comings and goings of village life. Eventually places of worship were built amounting to tree poles holding up a roof structure to shelter worshippers from the sun. So services were conducted in full view of the surrounding villagers. As they went about their daily tasks they could at least feel part of the church event. And then of course after a period of time walls were built and the community and the church from that moment were aliens.

What is normal to us about the church environment is alien to the majority of people in this country who have no church or faith experience whatsoever. Sunday is not a holy day or even a special day other than a day off from the normal working week.

The other thing that we must guard against when we are thankful for our church history is complacency.

NOW: That brings us to the PRESENT. Our regular attendance, our normal meetings, our anticipated events in the life of the church all enable us to feel comfortable and expectant that things will continue as they've always been.

But the real leaps forward in the church have been when people have stood up and done something different they've been when individuals have stood up against the accepted dogma of the day and created new ways of doing things.

People like John Wesley, who was banned from preaching or leading services in the Anglican Church of which he was an Anglican Priest or even in Anglican parishes anywhere ... and finally he stood on his father's gravestone and claimed that they couldn't stop him there. From him came the Methodist Revival which changed the history of church worldwide.

People like William Wilberforce whose life time fight against slavery eventually saw it abolished, despite leading clerics claiming a God given right to forcibly chain and enslave black people who they believed were less than human.

People like Elizabeth Fry,

People like Florence Nightingale,

People like Martin Luther King Jnr,

People like William Booth,

People like Trevor Huddleston and Desmond Tutu

Bur apart from these great names in history the church still has thousands of ordinary people doing extra ordinary things to extend the Kingdom of God and often, as Paul says in that letter to the Corinthians, it's the weak and most unlikely...

People like Liz,

People like Charlotte let me tell you about Charlotte.....

Yes. Often God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

FUTURE: The Kingdom of God is alive and well and its here in the Yarra Valley and its churches. It's reflected in the lives of you all.

YOU are all God's champions and God will surely give you strength to his will in the world.

God will give you all vision to explore and make the future happen and create a new image or role for the church where YOU are. The spirit of God is with YOU.

As Paul says in his letter to Timothy “The word of God is not in chains”. It’s in and with you. Break through the conformity of doing normal stuff, get rid of complacency and make the world see the vitality and freedom of the Gospel.

Hymn

Tune: Lobe Den Herren 14 14.4 7 8 TIS 111

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation;
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation.
Come all who hear,
brothers and sisters draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord who in all things is wondrously reigning
and, as on wings of an eagle, uplifting, sustaining:
have you not seen
all that is needed has been
sent by his gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who will prosper our work and defend us;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend us:
ponder anew
what the Almighty can do
as with his love he befriends us.

Praise to the Lord, who when darkness of sin is abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph, our best hopes confounding,
sheds forth his light,
scatters the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him.
Let the Amen sound from his people again:
gladly for ever adore him. *Joachim Neander tr. Catherine Winkworth 1827-78 and others*

Offering Prayer Loving and generous God –

as we offer You the fruits of our labours, may we
also generously share with others the fruits of your
Spirit. May our offerings help nourish people in crisis.
We pray this is Jesus' Name. Amen.

Offering Song Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One,
give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ His Son.
And now let the weak say, "I am strong",
let the poor say, "I am rich
because of what the Lord has done for us",
Give thanks, give thanks, give thanks. *Henry Smith*

Prayers of the people

Hymn *Tune: The Ash Grove 12 11.12 11 D TIS 531*

Sent forth by God's blessing, our true faith confessing,
the people of God from his table take leave.
The supper is ended: may now be extended
the fruits of his service in all who believe.
The seed of his teaching, our hungry souls reaching,
shall blossom in action for all humankind.
His grace shall incite us, his love shall unite us
to work for his kingdom, his purpose to find.

With praise and thanksgiving to God ever-living
the tasks of our everyday life we will face,
our faith ever sharing, in love ever caring,
embracing as neighbours all those of each race.
One feast that has fed us, one light that has led us,
unite us as one in his life that we share.
Then may all the living, with praise and thanksgiving,
give honour to Christ and his name that we bear. *Omer Westendorf 1916-alt*

Benediction