

**ORDER OF WORSHIP**  
**St. Margaret's Uniting Church -**  
**EPIPHANY 7**  
**Rev Dr. Barry Brown**

**Sunday 7, Feb 24<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Make God your chief delight,  
**and your heart's purest desire shall be given to you.**  
The meek shall possess the land,  
**and delight themselves in God's generosity.**  
The salvation of loving people is from God,  
**God is their fixed point in the troubles of life.**

**HYMN:** "You were in this place - but we never knew" (Altogether Whatever 433)

1. At the dawn of the ages  
you pulled land from the sea.  
With your word you invented  
all we know, all we see:  
creek and desert and forest,  
red and grey kangaroo.  
You were in this place -  
but we never knew.

2. Paintings seen on the rock face,  
foot-prints left in the sand,  
camp-fire next to the river,  
songs that rise from the land:  
signs that seem so elusive,  
shadows just out of view.  
You were in this place -  
but we never knew.

3. Do we take after Jacob,  
blind to what lies at hand,  
needing dreams to inform us  
God is here in this land?  
See him suffering and dying,  
bread and wine tell the news.  
You were in this place -  
but we never knew.

4. Jesus, open our senses,  
help us see you today  
in the person beside us,  
as we work, as we play.  
While we love you and serve you,

may it never be true:  
you were in this place -  
but we never knew.

Words and music: Robin Mann  
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## **PRAYER OF APPROACH**

God of Jesus, the joy of loving hearts, we love you!

Joy of dawn, joy of dusk,  
joy of sunshine, joy of rain,  
joy of birth, joy of growth,  
joy of maturity, joy of death,  
we worship you.

Joy of the meek, joy of the poor,  
joy of peacemakers, joy of the pure,  
joy of the persecuted, joy of the hungry,  
joy of the thirsty, joy of the outcaste,  
we worship you.

Joy of givers, joy of the generous,  
joy of good measure, pressed down and running over,  
joy of the forgiven, , joy of the mercy-full,  
joy of the loving, joy of the hope-full,  
we love and adore you.

Most awesome Friend, in our sanest and purest moments,  
we do delight in you more than misers in gold and kings in sceptres.  
Glory be to you, loving God, on earth and in heaven, for ever and ever!  
***Amen!***

## **A WORD FOR THE CHILDREN**

**HYMN TIS 236:** “Jesus’ hands were kind hand, doing good to all”

1

Jesus’ hands were kind hands, doing good to all,  
healing pain and sickness, blessing children small,  
washing tired feet, and saving those who fall:  
Jesus’ hands were kind hands, doing good to all.

2

Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you,  
make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do;  
let me watch you, Jesus, till I’m gentle too,  
till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.

## **PRAYER OF CONFESSION and ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:**

### **Introduction.**

In some ways Christianity may seem like bad news. In the life of Christ Jesus, the bar has been raised to unprecedented heights, and that sees most of us falling a long way short.

*Silent reflection*

Yet there is also very good news, for through Christ God has also shown us “plenteous grace to cover all our sins.” As we embrace the fullness of the good news, let us with quiet confidence confess our sin, saying together:

**Before God and the people of God we confess to our brokenness, to the ways that we wound our life, the life of others and the life of the world.**

**Hear Christ word of love to us, God forgives you, Christ renews you and the Spirit enables you to live in love.**

**Thanks be to God!**

**PSALM 37: 1-11, 39-40**

A Paraphrase With a Response

Don't you fret because of the wicked,  
nor be envious of those who do bad things.  
They will dry up like grass,  
wither like cut green foliage.

***Don't be jealous when scum bags seem to win.  
Don't be spooked; God is not fooled.***

Trust in your God and do what good you can,  
take your place in the land and be secure,  
Find your delight in knowing God,  
and your deepest longings will be met.

***True riches are found in unseen things,  
“Get high” on God and you will not fall.***

Commit all your ways to God,  
trust, for God is always at work.  
Your vindication will be sure as sunrise,  
your justification as bright as high noon.

***Don't expect God to jump when you speak,  
trust and obey and you will never be let down.***

Rest in God's stillness, and be patient,  
Do not fret when evil seems to prosper.  
The wicked will find themselves cut off,  
but those who wait will possess the land.

***Make space for the gift of grace,  
the busiest saints always have time.***

In a short time the wicked will be no more,  
their mansions will stand empty.  
But the meek will inherit the earth  
and delight in the shalom of God.

***For those who have the guts to be gentle,  
all manner of things will be well.***

*B. D Prewer 2006*

## **SCRIPTURE**

### **1 Corinthians 15. Verses 35 to 38 & 50 to 58**

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ....

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

### **Luke 6: 27-38**

But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

## **REFLECTION:**

# **"The Big Surprise !"**

[The following is an outline of a sermon preached by the Rev Dr Barry Brown on Sunday 24 February 2019. The minister planned for the service had taken ill a few days previously. This sermon is based on 1 Corinthians 15 as a whole. This chapter from the NT Letters had been assigned by the Revised Common Lectionary for reading over the past three weeks. Parts of this sermon are adapted from a sermon Barry preached at Wandin Uniting Church on Sunday 17 February 2019].

Several decades ago I visited Wesley's chapel in London for the first time and was taken by a guide to visit John Wesley's grave, located behind the chapel. The guide explained that when John Wesley told his brother, Charles, that he wished to be buried there, Charles stormed off in protest and immediately arranged for his own burial in the grounds of Saint Marylebone Parish Church – in consecrated ground! The guide went on to say: "I'd love to be there on resurrection morning, when the brothers meet - for the Big Surprise" !

## **1 Corinthians 15**

This chapter is probably the most carefully argued part of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, triggered by some local factors and diversions unknown to us. So Paul addresses this key topic. Resurrection is central to the Christian Gospel, the Good News that Paul had received and passed on. Belief in the Resurrection is inextricably linked with the Resurrection of Jesus – which had multiple witnesses: Peter, 12 others, then 500, then James and the Apostles; and finally to Paul (Note: This was more like a vision on the Damascus Road). It was this witness of experience that was important. Resurrection Belief is based upon the witness of lived experience – not on some form of 'forensic proof.'

[Excursus: Wesley's *quadrilateral* – Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience – as important for the formation of Christian Belief].

### **The First and Second Adam**

Here Paul is using metaphorical language. The First Adam (with a physical body) represents humans with all their strengths and failing. The Second Adam (Jesus, with a spiritual body) is the forerunner who represents the promise of the final Resurrection. In the Resurrection of Jesus we witness "the first fruits" of a new order that is set in motion. Christian belief is that 'Our Promised Resurrection' will be a personal realization of this, and that in anticipation of this we are called to be involved by living the new life now.

*"When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all".*

### **More than a continuation of our present life:**

Paul addresses the question: *But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"* His response was:

*"If there has been a physical body, there is also a spiritual body..."*

Rev Dr Douglas Fullerton, [*The Hope of the Matter: Reflections on the resurrection faith*, edited by Nigel Watson, JBCE, Melbourne, 1980] wrote:

"In our Western intellectual tradition we have two ways of finding hope in the presence of death. One way is of the Greeks, who talk about the immortality of the soul.

The other is the way of the Christian, who affirms faith and declares: 'I believe in the resurrection of the body'.

There is a crucial difference in these two hopes. The Greek hope is in the quality of human nature, the indestructible core of our being, which death cannot destroy.

The Christian hope is in the God who can raise the dead (BB and make all things new!).

What the New Testament has to say about resurrection has a double meaning. It is future oriented, and it is rooted in the present.

As I face the future, Jesus resurrection from the dead points to the possibility of life after death for me. The God who raised him from death will raise to new life those who turn

to him in trust. But the hope that is rooted in Jesus Christ is not limited to our personal futures. He affirms God's coming kingdom..." p75-6.

### Mystery, Wonder and Poetry

Walter Brueggemann, in his book *Finally come the poet* reminds us that some of the central truths of the Judeo Christian Faith cannot be expressed in Prose. So metaphor and Poetry are important (and need to be understood as such).

PAUL: *Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality* (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

I've created a problem for my family concerning what is to happen to my remains following my death. At my 'Pine Grove Property' (a humble grave plot in a country cemetery), or have my ashes scattered at the Lilydale Memorial Garden?

Personally, I'm not particularly bothered. I am sometimes concerned about the event of my own death – the how? But I have no concern about what lies beyond. It will be the Great Surprise!

I have conducted many funeral over the past 52 years. I have always seen it as important to 'witness to the Resurrection' in a homily. To preaching the Good News does not mean explaining a doctrinal proposition. Rather, it is pointing to Jesus, to the One who is himself 'The Resurrection and the Life'

In my ongoing manuscript reflection, *Still Wondering*, I have recorded that I still do not understand some of the key 'truths' of the Christian Faith. Yet, I am happy to live with the Mystery and the Hope they represent. This frees me to get on with living and serving as best I can in the remaining years of my life.

### Closing Exhortation:

Having assured the Corinthian Christians of the centrality and hope of the Resurrection, Paul closes this chapter with an exhortation – exhorting them to hold close to that hope, and to get on with the day to day practice of living out that hope.

*"Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain".*

Christian faith is more than having a sense of security about the future for our own souls, about what happens beyond the grave.

This important sense of security frees us to live a positive, active and courageous life that seeks to live out daily the words that Jesus taught us pray:

*'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' Amen.*

### **HYMN TIS 682: "When human voices cannot sing"**

1

When human voices cannot sing  
and human hearts are breaking,  
we bring our grief to you, O God  
who knows our inner aching.

2

Set free our spirits from all fear -  
the cloud of dark unknowing,  
and let the light, the Christ-light show  
the pathway of our going.

3

Make real for us your holding love,  
the love which is your meaning,  
the power to move the stone of death,  
the hope of Easter morning.

4

And let the one we love now go  
where we, in faith, shall follow,  
to travel in the Spirit's peace,  
to make an end to sorrow.

## **SHARING OUR COMMUNITY LIFE**

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

#### **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

We offer these gifts and the service of our lives to you, O God, as signs of our gratitude for all you have done and are doing for us. Without your love as we know it in Jesus, our lives would lack meaning and purpose. We pray that these gifts and our witness may help others to discover in Jesus new meaning and purpose for their lives. Amen

#### **HYMN TIS 672: "Lord of earth and all creation"**

1

Lord of earth and all creation,  
let your love possess our land:  
wealth, and freedom, far horizons,  
mountain, forest, shining sand:  
may we share, in faith and friendship,  
gifts unmeasured from your hand.

2

People of the ancient Dreamtime,  
they who found this country first,  
ask with those, the later comers,  
will our dream be blessed or cursed?  
Grant us, Lord, new birth, new living,  
hope for which our children thirst.

3

Lord, life-giving healing Spirit,  
on our hurts your mercy shower;  
lead us by your inward dwelling,  
guiding, guarding, every hour.  
Bless and keep our land Australia:  
in your will her peace and power.

## **REPORT BACK BY THE CHILDREN**

### **WORD OF MISSION AND BLESSING**

Go now and give your life to the Lord.  
Trust in God and do good.  
Love and bless everyone, even your enemies.  
Do not judge others, but be merciful and generous to all.  
Treat others and you would have them treat you.

And may God be quick to act on your behalf;  
May Christ Jesus raise you to new and everlasting life;  
And may the Holy Spirit go before you  
to prepare a place for you and provide for you.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,  
In the name of Christ. Amen.

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