

# Order of Service

St.Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark  
17 Feb 2019 Epiphany 6 – Rev Dr Robert Stringer

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## **THEME; Luke's Beatitudes**

**INTROIT TIS 390:** “Alleluia, Alleluia, give thanks...” Verses 1-2  
*Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,  
alleluia, alleluia, give praise to his name.*

1  
Jesus is Lord of all the earth;  
he is the King of creation.

2  
Spread the good news o'er all the earth:  
Jesus has died and has risen.

## **WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD**

### **WELCOME**

### **WELCOME TO COUNTRY & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ANCESTORS**

We gather together on the land that cared and nurtured the people of the Kulin nation. The land where the people of the Wurundjeri language gather and celebrated their stories, songs and dances passed on by their ancestors, and the Great Spirit of the Dreaming over countless generations.

We acknowledge these ancestors and give thanks for their memory. We also acknowledge and give thanks for the foremothers and forefathers of St Margaret's Uniting Church. All those who have given their gifts to be a shining light of God for the wider community. To this community of saints, living and dead, named and unnamed we pay our respects.

### **LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE**

We light the Christ Candle

**We celebrate God coming to us in human form  
bringing light to the world.**

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** *Based on Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-10*

Blessed are those who trust in God - in God alone;

**their lives are rooted in God's righteousness  
and nourished by God's word.**

They are like the great river red gums, soaring high and rooted deep;  
tapping into the water below - their foundations are strong, even in

times of drought.

Woe to those who trust only in themselves - who mock God and all things sacred;  
**By their actions, they separate themselves from God, the Source of life**  
Dried up and useless, they are blown about like dried grass - in all directions -  
hindering and obstructing the way of the righteous.

**Bless us, O God, and keep us connected to you, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit - source and sustaining force of our lives.**

**HYMN TIS 100:** “All creatures of our God and King” Verses 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7.

1

All creatures of our God and King,  
lift up your voice and with us sing  
alleluia, alleluia;  
O burning sun with golden beam,  
and silver moon with softer gleam,  
O praise him, O praise him,  
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

2

Swift-rushing winds that are so strong,  
and clouds that sail in heaven along,  
O praise him, alleluia;  
fresh-rising morn, in praise rejoice,  
and lights of evening, find a voice:  
O praise him, O praise him,  
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

3

O flowing water, pure and clear,  
make music for your Lord to hear,  
alleluia, alleluia!  
O fire, so masterful and bright,  
providing us with warmth and light,  
O praise him, O praise him,  
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

4

Dear mother earth, who day by day  
unfold rich blessings on our way,  
O praise him, alleluia!  
All flowers and fruits that in you grow,  
let them his glory also show;  
O praise him, O praise him,  
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

7

Let all things their Creator bless,  
and worship him in humbleness;  
O praise him, alleluia!  
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,

and praise the Spirit, Three in One:  
O praise him, O praise him,  
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

### **OPENING PRAYER**

Creator God, we praise you and we adore you. Our landscape testifies to the beauty of creation, where the great river red gums are enabled to blossom and bear fruit by drawing their nourishment through their roots. Our gathering here for worship testifies to the wonder of your care for us, as you enable our lives to be nourished with Jesus - Life of the world. You also empower us to blossom and to bear fruit through the gift of your Holy Spirit. Even in the most arid times of our lives we are strengthened by the knowledge of your presence and your power growing and blossoming within us. May this time of worship ground us even deeper in your life and love, O God, in Jesus' name. Amen

### **WE LISTEN FOR A WORD FROM GOD**

#### **FROM THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES**

*The Book of Jeremiah the prophet. Chapter 17. Verses 5 to 10*

Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse - who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

### **A WORD FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN**

#### **SUGGESTED CHILDREN'S TALK**

If you can find a picture of a river red gum, (these trees were made famous by Sir Hans Heysen's paintings - books containing pictures of his paintings would be available in local/school libraries) bring that along to show how big, strong and colourful these trees are. Bring along also a branch of a gum tree with leaves and - if possible - flowers or gumnuts attached.

Explain how eucalypts are well adapted to the Australian climate - with their thick bark protecting the next layer of wood - the sapwood - beneath. Under the outer bark there is often a reserve of leaf buds so that if a tree is damaged by fire, the fire causes a change to occur under the bark forcing the buds to shoot out and to begin the growth process again. The heartwood of the tree is protected by the thick bark and the new shoots are fed by the stored food in the heart of the tree.

The river red gum is especially protected and able to withstand drought and

fire. They are found all over this country, in parks and gardens but mainly lining river banks - sometimes the rivers they line are of sand only, the water flowing deep beneath the surface of the earth. The river gums have massive root systems which enable them to draw up this water from far below the surface. They have dense red heartwood as their core and this is covered by shiny white bark to reflect the heat. Their leaves angle away from the sun to conserve any moisture and to lessen evaporation. The prophet Jeremiah says that those people who are faithful to God's rules for living are like a tree "planted by water, sending out its roots to the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought" - and we all know how frequently that can occur here - 'it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.' We've heard how well protected the river gum tree is - and we are no different - if our lives have their roots - their foundation - in God - and that is what we learn about and grow each time we come to church and Sunday school - then we will be able to withstand and cope with whatever happens in our lives. We can compare learning about God and Jesus with the tree being fed in its heartwood by the moisture it needs each day so that it can grow and flower and fruit. As we take the teaching about God and Jesus into our hearts, we too will blossom and flourish and bear fruit - fruit we describe as love.

**HYMN TIS 135:** "All things bright and beautiful"

*All things bright and beautiful,  
all creatures great and small,  
all things wise and wonderful  
the Lord God made them all.*

1

The wildflowers in their beauty,  
the mountain ranges tall,  
the billabongs and rivers,  
and friendly birds that call,

2

The cold wind in the winter,  
the bright, life-giving sun,  
the ripe fruits in the garden --  
he made them every one.

3

The coloured walls of gorges,  
the gum trees green and tall,  
the rocks, and pools, and palm trees,  
the sparkling waterfall,

4

The many-coloured corals,  
the creatures of the sea,  
of bushland, field or desert,  
on farms, or roaming free,

5

He gave us eyes to see them,  
and lips that we might tell  
how great is God Almighty  
who has made all things well.

### **WE SEND OUT THE YOUNG PEOPLE**

We send you out to play and learn together,  
and to discover how much God loves you.

### **INTRODUCTION TO PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

We know that faith which is grounded in self-advancement with little or no thought for the welfare of others, has very shallow roots and will find it difficult to find sufficient nourishment in the arid times of life. We know that survival requires deep roots, yet so often we fail to ground our faith in God and God's kingdom values revealed so clearly by Jesus.

*Two readers required for following:*

**VOICE 1:** Jesus looked up at his disciples - looks at us - and says:  
Blessed are you who are poor, you who are hungry, you who are weeping,  
you who are despised.

**VOICE 2:** Woe to you who are rich, who are full now, who are laughing now,  
woe to you when all speak well of you.

**VOICE 1:** These words don't sound too much in keeping with our value systems today. Why don't we rewrite these Beatitudes to make them more relevant for people of our generation?

**VOICE 2:** What a good idea! How about these?  
Blessed are those who are prosperous and successful;  
blessed are those who know how to use power to manipulate others  
and achieve their goals; blessed are those who keep to themselves  
and don't even know their neighbours' names - never mind loving  
them; blessed are we church members - we take pride in looking after  
ourselves and our buildings.

**VOICE 1:** That's more like it - we'll get somewhere with these!  
*(These two 'readers' shake hands and congratulate one another)*

Yet it was attitudes such as these that Jesus was speaking against.

**Jesus was not prosperous;**

Jesus gave his power away;

**Jesus loved people without reserve;**

and are we not disciples of Jesus, seeing people through his eyes  
and serving and caring as he did?

## ***Silent reflection***

Merciful God, forgive us when we exclude people such as those whom Jesus calls blessed. Open our hearts and our hands to reach out and to risk loving and serving those who suffer, and are hurting and exploited in our society. As disciples of Christ and rooted in him, we pray that the fruit of the Holy Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control - may be borne in abundance in our lives and actively shared with neighbours with needs. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

The Apostle Paul writes: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins...But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead..." (1 Corinthians 15:17,20)

Believe therefore the good news that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God!**

### **FROM THE EARLY CHRISTIAN LETTERS**

*The first letter of St.Paul to the Corinthians. Chapter 15. Verses 12 to 20*

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

In this scripture is the word of the Lord!

**Thanks be to God.**

### **FROM THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL**

*The GOSPEL according to St.Luke. Chapter 6. Verses 17 to 26*

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Thank you, God, for your word to us today!

**Thank you, God, for Christ Jesus, a living Word!**

**SERMON:**

## **Luke's Beatitudes**

### **Luke 6: 17-26**

What do you experience/feel when you go to the very large shopping complexes around our city and view all the wealth of goods that are available for purchase?

Today's reading challenges that consumerism as we continue looking at the implications of the manifesto of Jesus in Luke. Today's reading is in stark contrast to Matthew's version of the beatitudes which we are probably more familiar with.

For example:

Matthew: Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven

Luke's version: Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the Kingdom of God

Matthew was writing for a mainly Jewish community.

Luke was writing for a gentile community. We also note that Luke includes many more stories of foreigners and women, for example the Good Samaritan.

In Matthew, Jesus and his disciples have separated themselves from the crowd by going up on the mountain (Mt 5:1-2) whereas Luke has Jesus and the disciples (the 12 and others) come down from the mountain to the plain and he is surrounded by a great crowd of people. Many more people are present wanting Jesus to heal them and are able to hear his teaching.

Matthew tends to spiritualise the beatitudes whereas Luke is very blunt.

### **BLESSINGS (vv. 20-26)**

It is important to note the evolution of the meanings of the Greek word ***makarios*** or "blessed".

According to the Biblical scholar Brian Stoffregen

In ancient Greek times, **makarios** referred to the gods. The blessed ones were the gods. They had achieved a state of happiness and contentment in life that was beyond all cares, labours, and even death.

In Greek usage, the word came to refer to the elite, the upper crust of society, the wealthy people. It referred to people whose riches and power put them above the normal cares and worries of the lesser folk - the peons, who constantly struggle and worry and labour in life. To be blessed, you had to be very rich and powerful.....

When this word, **makarios** was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it took on another meaning. It referred to the results of right living or righteousness. If you lived right, you were blessed. Being blessed meant you received earthly, material things: a good wife, many children, abundant crops, riches, honour, wisdom, beauty, good health, etc. A blessed person had more things and better things than an ordinary person.

Jesus turns this Old Testament order of things upside down. Jesus uses this word blessed in a totally different way. It is not the rich and powerful who are blessed. It is not the people living in large houses or expensive mansions who are blessed. Rather, Jesus pronounces God's blessings on the lowly: the poor, the hungry, the hurting, and the despised. In other words a continuation of God's option for the poor.

The poor or "destitute" might be a better way of translating this word. It implies a continuous state of poverty, where those who have no money, those who have no job, who have no possessions, who are on the street begging for the essentials of life. This is the word used of "Poor Lazarus" (16:20, 22). The important thing to note here is that in Jesus' vision of the kingdom, a new society, in Jesus' scheme of things these are the people who will benefit, because those who have the resources will share them and they will be lifted out of poverty and begin to know the benefits of a more just and equal society. My friend Nathan Nettleton refers to the kingdom of God as "the culture of God." The culture of God is the situation where everyone has the basic necessities of life, a society

### **THE WOES (vv. 24-26)**

To drive this point home Luke has Jesus add a series of "woes" as part of this teaching. These verses about the "woes" are unique to Luke. The Greek word for "woe" (*ouai*) is an expression of pain or anger. Woe!!! It is a word that anticipates disasters, horrors, pain, and anguish. As Nathan Nettleton translates it "woe" is equivalent to "the writing is on the wall." Luke uses woe to point out the opposite or the spiritual attitude that will bring about a difference to the way we are being asked to live in the kingdom or culture of Godliness..

These woes, for the most part, reflect the opposites of the blessings.

- poor vs. rich
- hungry vs. filled up

- crying vs. laughing
- hated, etc. vs. spoken well of

So what are those who don't want to be part of the Kingdom of God missing out on?

**V.24 But woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation**

The Greek word is *paraklesis*. translated consolation. It is related to the word Paraklete. The related verb, *parakaleo*, literally means "to call to one's side." The reasons for "calling to one's side" are varied and lead to a number of meanings for this word: "to invite, to help, to encourage, to console, to exhort, to request, etc." That is the rich are able to have all the help they need. I think that Luke is having a play on words here, because this is the word it is used to translate the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God.

The image we get from this woe is that the rich already have everything they could ask for. If that is all they need by contrast they have no need for the richness of God in their lives. If there is a twist here it is that the rich miss out on the most important aspect of life and that is the Spirit of God that creates a just and sharing well-ordered society that benefits everyone.

The rich in Luke -- in many instances appear in opposition to the poor: 12:16; 14:12; 16:1, 19, 21, 22; 18:23, 25; 19:2; 21:1. When Luke talks about the rich, he gives examples of those who use their wealth properly, for example Zacchaeus (21:1) and the rich man, who by helping poor Lazarus, could save himself from future torment (16:19-22).

In the second woe vs. the second blessing we have a rich use of two different words.

**V.25 Woe to you who are full now for you will be hungry.**

This second woe uses the Greek word *emphi(m)plemi* means "to fill, to satisfy; to enjoy" whereas the blessing used a different word *chortazo* which means "feed, satisfy; eat one's fill." "To fill with food," can also simply mean "to fill" or "to be satisfied". It is the same word used in Mary's song of praise: "he **has filled** the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (1:53). Here Luke is referring to those who use their wealth to enjoy themselves rather than a way of living that motivates people to reach out to God and to fellow human beings in order to create a new just and sharing community.

The third woe.

**V. 25a: Woe to you who are laughing now for you will mourn and weep**

A difference in the third woe vs. the third blessing is the addition of *pentheo* -- "to mourn." This is the same word used in Matthew's beatitude: "Blessed are those who **mourn**, for they will be comforted" (*parakaleo!*) (Mt 5:4). In Luke the word to mourn denotes more of the inner sadness that is outwardly expressed by

weeping or wailing. The woe refers to those who indulge in too much laughter and frivolity and celebrate when all is going well, then when tough times come they will be the ones who will have an inner sadness and mourn the loss of what they had rather than the inner resources to cope with different circumstances where sharing the life of the kingdom gives strength and stability..

The fourth woe

**V.26: Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.**

This woe follows the grammar of the fourth blessing: "when" (or "if") something happens then..... Be careful what happens to you when all the people speak well of you it could be that they just want to flatter you and share you wealth. Luke indicates the need for care because when this happens, it could be false. Other people want to access your wealth by flattery rather than the love and concern for people in God's kingdom. We note that immediately after the "woes," Jesus says: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (6:27-28). These "woes" need to be interpreted as words motivated by love .

So this passage can be summed up in the paraphrase by the Rev Nathan Nettleton of the Yarra Baptist Church:

“You who own next to nothing have got it made,  
because you are already at home in the culture of God.  
“You who don’t have enough to eat now have got it made,  
because you will be filled with good things.  
“You who are grief stricken now have got it made,  
because you will be all smiles and laughter.

“And if people hate you and shut you out, treat you like dirt and drag your name through the mud because of your association with me, then you really have got it made! You’re in great company because in every generation they’ve done the same thing to all God’s faithful messengers. So sing! Dance! Celebrate! Heaven is coming and you will be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams!

“But the writing is on the wall for you who have got it all now.  
That’s it for you. You’ve got nothing more to look forward to.  
“And the writing is on the wall for you who consume to excess.  
You’ve had your share. You’re going to go hungry.  
“The writing is on the wall for you who think it’s all a big joke now.  
The smile is going to be wiped right off your face.

“And if everybody is fawning over you and saying how wonderful you are, then the writing is well and truly on the wall. They come from a long line of people who fawned over every religious charlatan that ever tickled their ears.”

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Another way of putting this in a nutshell: If we listen to Jesus we are set free from the seduction of wealth and abundance, when we spend it in the service of others.

**TIS 648:** “Help us accept each other”

1

Help us accept each other  
as Christ accepted us;  
teach us as sister, brother,  
each person to embrace.  
Be present, Lord, among us  
and bring us to believe  
we are ourselves accepted  
and meant to love and live.

2

Teach us, O Lord, your lessons,  
as in our daily life  
we struggle to be human  
and search for hope and faith.  
Teach us to care for people,  
for all -- not just for some,  
to love them as we find them  
or as they may become.

3

Let your acceptance change us,  
so that we may be moved  
in living situations  
to do the truth in love;  
to practise your acceptance  
until we know by heart  
\* the table of forgiveness  
and laughter's healing art.

4

Lord, for today's encounters  
with all who are in need,  
who hunger for acceptance,  
for righteousness and bread,  
we need new eyes for seeing,  
new hands for holding on:  
renew us with your Spirit;  
Lord, free us, make us one!

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:**

Invite people to think about silently or name aloud those people whom they believe would today fit into Jesus' description of “blessed”. Pray for them

and their situations. Likewise with the “woes” or  
Two short prayers “A Well of Stillness” page 40 and “Jesus A Story That  
Never Dies Down” - Page 125 in *Campfire of the Heart* - or “For Faith”  
Page 110f and “Where People Live” -Page 119 in *Australian Prayers*

### **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.

### **OFFERING and OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

Bless these gifts and our lives, O God. We offer them to you in the hope that  
will be used to transform the values and oppressive systems of this world  
into the values and justice of your kingdom. The place of blessing where  
people have their roots in your love as revealed in Jesus, in whose name  
we pray. Amen

### **HYMN TIS 690: “Beauty for brokenness”**

1  
Beauty for brokenness,  
hope for despair,  
Lord, in the suffering,  
this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children,  
justice, joy, peace,  
sunrise to sunset  
your kingdom increase.

2  
Shelter for fragile lives,  
cures for their ills,  
work for the craftsmen,  
trade for their skills;  
land for the dispossessed,  
rights for the weak;  
voices to plead the cause  
of those who can’t speak.

*God of the poor,  
friend of the weak,  
give us compassion we pray;  
melt our cold hearts,  
let tears fall like rain.*

*Come change our love  
from a spark to a flame.*

3  
Refuge from cruel wars,  
havens from fear,  
cities for sanctuary,  
freedoms to share,  
peace to the killing-fields,  
scorched earth to green;  
Christ for the bitterness,  
his cross for the pain.

4  
Rest for the ravaged earth,  
oceans and streams,  
plundered and poisoned,  
our future, our dreams.  
Lord, end our madness,  
carelessness, greed;  
make us content with  
the things that we need.  
*God of the poor.....*

5  
Lighten our darkness,  
breathe on this flame  
until your justice burns  
brightly again;  
until the nations  
learn of your ways,  
seek your salvation  
and bring you their praise.  
*God of the poor .....*

### **BENEDICTION**

Go into this week  
blessed by the overwhelming goodness of God  
blessed by the inclusive love of Jesus Christ  
blessed by the limitless growth of the Holy Spirit

### **ASCRPTION TIS 755:** “You shall go out with joy”

You shall go out with joy and be led forth in peace,  
and the mountains and hills shall break forth in singing.  
There'll be shouts of joy, and the trees of the field  
shall clap, shall clap their hands,  
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
and you'll go out with joy.

