

St. Margaret's Uniting Church Mooroolbark

Rev Dr. Robert Stringer – (Supply Minister)

Sunday 3rd February, 2019
Epiphany 4 – Holy Communion

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD:

WELCOME

AKNOWLEDGING THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Based on Psalm 71:1-6*

In God, we find a place of refuge –

a strong and secure place of shelter and safety –

giving us confidence to believe that you hear us and protect us.

God is the foundation of our hope, the source of our trust;

a rock to lean on and a safe place to rest in from the time of our birth.

WE SING: TIS 275: "Hail to the Lord's anointed"

1
Hail to the Lord's anointed,
great David's greater Son;
hail, in the time appointed,
his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
to let the captive free,
and take away transgression,
and rule in equity.

2
He comes with help and mercy
to those who suffer wrong,
to raise the poor and needy,
and bid the weak be strong,
to give them songs for sighing,
their darkness turn to light,
whose souls condemned and
dying
were precious in his sight.

3
He shall come down like showers
upon the fruitful earth,
and love, joy, hope, like flowers,

spring in his path to birth;
before him on the mountains
shall peace the herald go,
and righteousness in fountains
from hill to valley flow.

4
Kings shall fall down before him,
and gold and incense bring;
all nations shall adore him,
his praise all people sing;
to him shall prayer unceasing
and daily vows ascend;
his kingdom still increasing,
a kingdom without end.

5
O'er every foe victorious,
he on his throne shall rest,
from age to age more glorious,
all blessing and all-blest.
The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove;
his name shall stand for ever,
that name to us is love.

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Living God, we praise you for filling us with the knowledge that in you we do find safety and security. In Jesus Christ, you have given us the confidence to believe that although the worst can happen, your love and your care for us remains as strong and as constant for ever. Jesus demonstrated that rejection, ridicule and even the risk of death did not stop him from proclaiming your love, your mercy and your everlasting life and power. We approach you, O God, confident in your constant love and protection.
We praise you, we trust you, we adore you.
In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Lord Jesus Christ, you were able to command us to love one another because you lived and breathed love in all you said and did.

Forgive us when we substitute ideas and words about love for its practice in our daily lives.

(silent reflection)

Lord Jesus Christ, you call us to be prophetic witnesses of your love.

Forgive us for justifying our lack of action by saying we would not know what words to say to people.

(silent reflection)

Lord Jesus Christ, you have shown us that love can be patient and kind; that genuine love is not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude. Above all, you demonstrated that love can bear all things, hope all things and endure all things.

Forgive us for being so influenced by the 'noisy gongs' and 'clanging cymbals' of our age that we fail to discern your call to love others as you love us.

(silent reflection)

Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us all in the knowledge that when our love has its source in you, it is indestructible by outward circumstances and influences. Realign our lives and our hearts to your love so that faith, hope and love dwell within us and our lives testify that the greatest of your gifts to us is truly the gift of love. **Amen**

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God's righteousness which rescues and saves us has been revealed in Jesus. For God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned (John 3: 17,18a), therefore I declare to you:
in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

WE SING TIS 453: "We limit not the truth of God"

1

We limit not the truth of God
to our poor reach of mind,
by notions of our day and sect,
crude, partial and confined:
no, let a new and better hope

within our hearts be stirred:
*the Lord has yet more light and truth
to break forth from his word.*

2
Our faithful forebears searching went
the first steps of the way;
this was the dawning, yet to grow
into the perfect day.
And grow it shall, our glorious sun
will brighter rays afford:

3
O Father, Son, and Spirit, send
us increase from above;
enlarge, expand all living souls
to comprehend your love;
and make us all go on to know,
with nobler powers conferred,

WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

OLD TESTAMENT: The Book of the prophet Jeremiah. Chapter 1. Verses 4 to 10

4 Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,

5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

7 But the Lord said to me,
"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

8 Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the Lord."

9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

EPISTLE: The first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Chapter 13. Verses 1 to 13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to

remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,^[a] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly,^[b] but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

THE GOSPEL according to St.Luke. Chapter 4. Verses 21 to 30

²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³ He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" ²⁴ And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers^[a] in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

REFLECTION

The Role of the Prophet

Luke 4:21-30

Background

Today's reading is a continuation of Luke's account of the first sermon of Jesus' Ministry in his home town of Nazareth and identifies the message of the prophetic ministry of Jesus and the response of the people in his home town.

If you are poor/disadvantaged and feel powerless living under unjust systems that seek to oppress you and your loved ones then:

The Good News is Jesus has your welfare in mind.
Here we have a brief insight into the way that Jesus preached in his home
synagogue. It is like a manifesto or mission statement and was based on

Isaiah 61:1-2:

1. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is
on me, because the Lord has
anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the broken-
hearted,
 to proclaim freedom for the captives
 and release from darkness for the
prisoners
2. to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favour and the day of vengeance of
our God, to comfort all who mourn,
 Luke 4:18-19

18. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is
on me, because the Lord has
anointed me
 to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim
freedom for the captives and recovery
of sight for the blind, to let the
oppressed go free,
19. to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favour
(CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)

The original words were spoken by the prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel when the leaders of Israel were in exile in Babylon, a message of a God who would send one who would seek out the poor/disadvantaged to bring them good news and who would set free those who were unwilling captives. Remember these were people who had lost their land, their King, their temple and were under house arrest in the foreign land of Babylon.

What was the nature of Jesus' prophetic message?

First: God has a real concern for the poor/oppressed.

Israel had developed a message that stressed God's blessing was essentially in terms of material well-being, many children, large harvests, health and long life.

Biblical well-being was seen in terms of "shalom" as the will of the Biblical God and implies a way of life that shared resources with those who were ill, oppressed, utterly powerless. This was in contrast to Mesopotamian society of the day where illness and poverty was seen as fate or as a punishment from God or a sign of human inferiority.

In contrast the Biblical tradition saw misery, poverty, powerlessness first of all as a scandal. It indicated that the wealthy who had been entrusted with God's blessing had not done their job by providing for the poor, the orphan, the widow and powerless.

Israel was to remember their own history as they remembered the exile and remembered entry into Canaan with nothing and how they had gradually changed their nomadic life style for that of land owners and city dwellers. In this way Jesus was taking up the prophet tradition that saw God as the defender of the poor in continuity with the prophets of the 8th century: Amos Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah.

The Second is a message of Good News :

The second response to the scandal of poverty and powerlessness goes beyond mere charity to the need for positive and political and practical action for social change.

This also is deeply grounded in the Biblical understanding of the prophets of the 6th and 7th Century BC and was supported by the revision of the law contained in the Book of Deuteronomy, the last of the first five books of the Bible known as "the law".

In Deuteronomy for example society not only protected the rights of the rich and merchants but also those who need help and those who did not have an adult male defender.

Land owners were obliged not to harvest the whole field but was instructed to leave gleanings for the poor and the widows. 24:19

Part of **the tithe** must be given to the poor, foreigners, orphans and widows. (14:21)

Land owners to pay daily. (24:15)

Forbidding lending money at interest. (23:19)

Forbidding exploiting the poor through the perversion of legal processes. (24:17-18)

It was probably just before the exile that such customs as the **Sabbath Year, the year of the Jubilee every 50 years** suggested in Leviticus 25

1. Leaving the land fallow,
2. Remission of debts,
3. Liberation of slaves,
4. Return of property

Although the latter was not necessarily enforced by law it remained a remarkable vision for the just ordering of society.

All this emphasis on a just society was being picked up by Jesus “the prophet” in his manifesto or mission statement that he gave as his sermon to his home town congregation where he had grown up and according to today’s reading **the people’s response was one of awe and amazement.** (4:22) In other words they initially responded positively.

In our modern times our understanding of how to overcome poverty and powerlessness includes understanding the structures that create poverty, e.g. lack of education, poor wages, unjust circumstances. The kind of things that we have laws to regulate against, most of which are heavily influenced by these Biblical concepts.

The prophet Jeremiah’s first mandate was to “pluck up and tear down,” to give utterance to the failure, destructiveness and destruction of life in the city where life was not organised according to the covenanting will of God. Jeremiah critiques the phony “shalom theology” of the city that in the name of Yahweh pretends that all is well, when in fact the city life is very destructive. He also advocated “to build and to plant” that is to put in place positive structures and encouragements.

Jeremiah is an advocate for the same reforms as found in the book of Deuteronomy. He spells this out later in Chapter 7:5-7,9:

“For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever.”

I spent a lot of time in Asia many years ago as part of the Christian Conference of Asia Urban Rural Mission Leadership Group.

There was a strong emphasis on what they called **those who were sinned against.** People are not only willful violators of God’s demands to live a good life but we have to be aware that as a society we must care for the most disadvantaged, those living with disabilities, racism, mental illness, indigenous people, homeless, working poor, occupational health and safety. Much of my ministry has been in this area of social justice, dealing with such issues. It is when we deal with these issues we are in a position to talk about people’s total wellbeing that we will gain the entry to talk about the purpose of our spirituality and life style.

Taking up Paul's famous words in 1 Cor 13, any evangelism (sharing the good news) means that we acknowledge and remind people of the importance of love as the motivation of everything that we do. Even prophecy does not have an imprimatur if it is not motivated by love.

So how do we communicate this message today as a people of God, as a church?

We must take our prophetic role seriously by continually identifying ourselves with particular people in need of support in our community.

In today's gospel we read that after Jesus had rolled up the scroll, he gave it to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the Synagogue were fixed on him. Then he said to them: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He was audacious enough to proclaim that the message started that day as he delivered the manifesto. His mission was among the poor and disadvantaged.

What angered the people was not the message which they were in awe of, but the examples that he quoted from the Old Testament: Elijah and the widow of Zarepath in Sidon and Elisha healing Naaman the Syrian of leprosy. That is, people who were outside the Jewish community. Jesus emphasized that this message was not just to the faithful in the way that they were to relate to one another but **the message was to include everyone, especially the foreigner and the outsider.**

And they took offence and in their rage they cast him out of the Synagogue. In fact they took him to a cliff and were about to kill him. The usual way was to throw people off cliffs and then to throw huge stones onto them until they died.

So the message on our notice board should clearly identify that we as a church have a concern for the good ordering of society and that we as a community of faith have a particular concern that all people in our society. They are to be included and receive the support that they need to feel that there are people who care and want everybody to have a sense of belonging.

We gather these thoughts up in the hymn TIS 674:

*Inspired by love and anger, disturbed by need and pain,
informed of God's own bias, we ask him once again:
How long must some folk suffer? How long can few folk mind?
How long dare vain self-interest turn prayer and pity blind?*

WE SING TIS 674: "Inspired by love and anger"

1

Inspired by love and anger, disturbed by need and pain,
informed of God's own bias, we ask him once again:
'How long must some folk suffer? How long can few folk mind?
How long dare vain self-interest turn prayer and pity blind?'

2

From those for-ever victims of heartless human greed,
their cruel plight composes a litany of need:
'Where are the fruits of justice? Where are the signs of peace?
When is the day when prisoners and dreams find their release?'

3

From those for ever shackled to what their wealth can buy,
the fear of lost advantage provokes the bitter cry:
'Don't query our position! Don't criticise our wealth!
Don't mention those exploited by politics and stealth!'

4

To God, who through the prophets proclaimed a different age,
we offer earth's indifference, its agony and rage:
'When will the wronged be righted? When will the kingdom come?
When will the world be generous to all instead of some?'

5

God asks, 'Who will go for me? Who will extend my reach?
And who, when few will listen, will prophesy and preach?
And who, when few bid welcome, will offer all they know?
And who, when few dare follow, will walk the road I show?'

6

Amused in someone's kitchen, asleep in someone's boat,
attuned to what the ancients exposed, proclaimed and wrote,
a Saviour without safety, a tradesman without tools
has come to tip the balance with fishermen and fools.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

"Love that leads to awareness"- Page 175 in *Be our Freedom, Lord* and
"Who We Are" page 77 in *Heart Gone Walkabout*

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.

OFFERTORY PRAYER:

Our God, we give thanks for the variety of ways you invite us to share our lives, our skills, and our love with all of your people – which in ways, large and small, brings hope and peace. May all we are able to bring and dedicate to you, help to share Your love around the world, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

WE SING TIS 693: "Come as you are..."

1

'Come as you are:
that's how I want you.
Come as you are;
feel quite at home,
close to my heart,
loved and forgiven.
Come as you are:
why stand alone?

2

'No need to fear,
love sets no limits;
no need to fear,
love never ends;
don't run away
shamed and disheartened,
rest in my love,
trust me again.

3

'I came to call sinners,
not just the righteous;
I came to bring peace,
not to condemn.
Each time you fail
to live by my promise,
why do you think
I'd love you the less?

4

'Come as you are:
that's how I love you;
come as you are,
trust me again.
Nothing can change
the love that I bear you;
all will be well,
just come as you are.

THE HOLY COMMUNION

Leader: The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

We thank you, Lord, our God for your loving trust in people

**In Creation, you first clothed us with dignity,
called us not things, but sons and daughters,
and saw that we were very good.**

You did not hesitate, even then to offer what was most intimate
to yourself — a share in your creative power.

**Thus, from the beginning, it has ever been our vocation
to fashion this world ourselves in the image of your love.**

**We, the whole of creation, in all our frailty and mystery,
with all our races and peoples, join hands around your table —
in doubt, in love, in risk, in hope — and offer you thanks in a new way: not by
being lifted out of what is human, but by daring to be what we truly are — work
of your loving hands.**

God-touched and frail, yet possessing a dignity beautiful beyond belief,
together we say:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, for your loving trust in people.

**When we lost faith in the dignity of our call, when we doubted
your love and cursed your law, you sent not your wrath to crush us, but your
Son to be our brother.**

He has come to our table and eaten our bread. He has walked in
the cool of the evening with people he called his friends.

His tears were real; his joys intense; his prayer — that we might
learn to love one another.

Yet, the sorrow which finally crushed him was one in which we all played a part. For, on the night before he died, he was betrayed by a man, by one who offered a kiss, by one who called him, “friend”.

Yet, on that very night he gave the greatest proof of his love. He took bread in his hands, and lifted his eyes to you, God, calling you, “Father”; he thanked you, blessed and broke the bread, and gave it to his friends with the words:

This is my body which will be given up for you.

When the supper was ended, he took the cup, gave thanks, and shared it with them saying:

This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.

It will be shed for you and for all people so that sins may be forgiven.

Now, whenever we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we recall the days when the Lord walked this earth; we remember especially that night when he proved his love in one final, total offering, by laying down his life for his friends. Living, he taught us how to live; Dying, he truly set us free.

Therefore, Lord, our God we gather about this table in the name of your Son, at his own request. We place here bread and wine — simple gifts — signs of our faith in your world.

We are conscious that this offering of faith is the one unchanging sign which links us to ages of Christians, past and to come. as nations rise and fall, as customs and cultures change with the years, yet, this, your sign, will ever remain: that people will recognize you, the living God, in breaking of the Bread.

So we do not approach your Table lightly, but only in the spirit of faith, because you bid us draw near.

(The bread and the cup are shared.)

Since we in the Christian community, O Lord, are those who have not seen, and yet are called upon to believe this mystery of faith, send over us, we pray, your Holy Spirit —

The Spirit who brings us life; the Spirit who helps us love; the Spirit who makes all that we do, not easy, but full of meaning. Only with the Spirit’s help can we truly be the Church of Jesus Christ. The Spirit’s presence in our community gives more than human meaning to the support and love that we show to one another. It’s through the Spirit that we are united in peace with all people, everywhere on this earth.

As we believe, so let us live. We pray that all people, looking upon us, your Christian community, will say in all sincerity, “See how they love one another”.

And wherever we have walked, the report will go around that the poor are clothed; the hungry, fed; the sorrowful, comforted; and all of creation proclaims the wondrous deeds of God.

All these things are possible, Lord, our God, only in Christ, and with him, and through him. For so you are praised and blessed on earth, in union with the Holy Spirit, today and all days unto eternity.

WE SING TIS 468: "We are your people"

1

We are your people;
Spirit of grace,
you dare to make us
to all our neighbours,
Christ's living voice, hands and
face.

2

Joined in community,
treasured and fed,
may we discover
gifts in each other,
willing to lead and be led

3

Rich in diversity,
help us to live
closer than neighbours,
open to strangers,
able to clash and forgive.

4

Glad of tradition,
help us to see
in all life's changing,
where you are leading,
where our best efforts should
be.

5

Give, as we venture
justice and care
(peaceful, resisting,
waiting or risking)
wisdom to know when and
where.

6

Christ, as we serve you
in different ways,
may all we're doing
show that you're living,
meeting your love with our
praise

BENEDICTION

May the word of God empower our words
the love of Jesus inhabit our hearts
and the breath of the Holy Spirit inspire our lives
today and every day. **Amen**

WE SING TIS 782: "Go now in peace?"

1

Go now in peace, go now in peace,

2

may the love of God surround you

3

everywhere, everywhere you may go.

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