

Order of Worship

St.Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark
10 March 2019 Lent 1 – Rev Dr Robert Stringer

INTROIT TIS 687: “God gives us a future” Verses 1-2

1
God gives us a future,
daring us to go
into dreams and dangers
on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow
in the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us,
for new life starts now.

2
We must leave behind us
sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning
is a better way.
Fear and doubt and habit
must not hold us back:
God gives hope, and insight,
and the strength we lack

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD

WELCOME

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY & 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:

In hope, in longing

We're glad to come together.

In trust, in community

We're glad to come together.

In many moods, in many shapes and sizes

We're glad to come together in this Lenten season. *(Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer/wsj)*

Hymn "We're Standing Here on Holy Ground"

(Tune TIS 453: 'Ellacombe(2)', 86.86D)

1. We're standing here on holy ground,
on land your hand has made;
Your art displayed in timeless rocks,
in purple haze and space;
Its mighty gums and feathery ferns
your beauty magnify.
Tread softly then, in awe reflect,
and listen to the land.

2. We're standing here on holy ground,
on land which ancients trod.
They wrote your law in hills and streams
in rocks and caves and trees;
A law to tell us who we are,
to guide and make us strong.
Tread gently then, respect the earth,
remember whence we've come.

3. We're standing here on holy ground,
on land that toil has shaped.
It's fertile plains will feed us all,
when tilled with care and love.
But mindless greed and drought and flood
wreak havoc in the land.
Then let us tread with love the earth,
that's fed us faithfully.

4. We're standing here on holy ground,
on land we long to share,
Where each has space and equity,
and neither want nor fear
But demons fierce are dancing here
of race and greed and hate.

Engrave upon our wills, we pray,
your ancient covenant law.

5. We're standing here on holy ground,
we seek your rule on earth;
Your will be done in politics,
in law court, market, church;
Your gentleness among us reign,
and each one dwell secure;
May generations yet unborn,
live here in harmony.

© John Brown. (Adapted - Verses 1-2, 4-6)

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND PRAISE

Liberator God, we praise you for acting to release people from whatever enslaves them. Your people of old remembered your great acts of mercy when you freed them from a land of oppression and led them into one flowing with milk and honey. Like them, we remember and celebrate the great gift of your mercy - your love in action. Love revealed forever in Jesus Christ Through his sacrificial life and love, we have been released from enslavement to sin and death. We remember today the beginning of his journey towards an agonising death for him, but towards the gift of life for us. May words of praise and adoration for such love be forever on our lips and in our hearts. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

A WORD FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN

"I'm going to GET you!" laughed Nina, as she chased her little sister around the sofa. Savanna giggled as she ran.

Usually the sun shone bright and hot, but the past few summer days had been stormy. The girls had played board games, and coloured, and read stories. Their mom had helped them bake cookies.

Today, it was STILL raining and Mom had to go to the doctor, so Mrs. Murphy was staying with them. It wasn't as much fun having a babysitter as having Mom with them, so the girls were making their own fun.

Round and round the sofa they ran. It was such fun...UNTIL Savanna bumped into the end table, and the special vase crashed to the floor.

"WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE, GIRLS?" Mrs. Murphy called from the kitchen table.



"Nothing!" the girls shouted together.
"Let's hide the broken pieces in the trash can," suggested Savanna.
"I think Mom will notice that it isn't here," replied her sister. "I think we should just TELL her what happened."
"We could tell her that Mrs. Murphy bumped into the table and broke it!" Savanna said in a whisper.
"No, Savanna," Nina said with a smile, as she hugged her little sister. "We CAN'T lie to Mom about the dish. She won't get mad if we tell the truth." Just then, the front door opened, and their mom came into the living room. "Oh, dear! What HAPPENED here?" she asked.

TIS 412: "God sends us his Spirit to befriend and help us"

1
God sends us his Spirit to befriend and help us,
re-create and guide us, Spirit-friend:
Spirit who enlivens, sanctifies, enlightens,
sets us free, is now our Spirit-friend.
Spirit of our Father, Spirit-friend,
Spirit of our Jesus, Spirit-friend,
Spirit of God's people, Spirit-friend.

2
Darkened roads are clearer, heavy burdens lighter
when we're walking with our Spirit-friend:
now we need not fear the powers of the darkness:
none can overcome our Spirit-friend,

3
Now we are God's people, bonded by his presence,
agents of his purpose, Spirit-friend:
lead us forward ever, slipping backward never,
to your re-made world, our Spirit-friend.

WE SEND OUT THE YOUNG PEOPLE

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

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious and merciful God, we confess to you our reluctance to enter the wilderness places where we are confronted with our true selves.

The places where we are tempted to put worldly values before our desire for you, and when our hunger for power and wealth is greater than our hunger for seeking and doing your will:

Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

When we are tempted to use the gifts you give us to benefit ourselves at the expense of serving others:

Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

When we are tempted to use sensational means to increase people's faith,
rather than being guided by the humility of Christ:

Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

When we are tempted to use bribery to influence and control people:

Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

When we are tempted to manipulate you, O God, to satisfy our own needs:

Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

A time of silence for personal confession

**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.**

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

**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!

WE LISTEN FOR A WORD FROM GOD

PSALM 91: 1-2 & 9-16 © B.D. Prewer 2000

You who live with the highest Friend,
and rest in the shade of pure Beauty,
**shall say to the Holy One: "My Home,
my Triune God in whom I trust."**

Because you have trusted the Holy One,
making the Highest your own home,
**no irredeemable evil shall happen to you,
no hopeless disaster flatten your flimsy life..**

God places you in the care of angels,
to look after you wherever you go.
**They will steady you with their hands
so that you shall not trip over a stone.**

You shall tread on beast and serpent,
you shall trample the devil under your feet.
**God shall save those who cling to him,
and lift up those who call his name.**

When we shout for help, You will answer us,
when under pressure, You will be with us.
**You will make us content us with a full life,
and display your saving, healing love.**

FROM THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

²⁶When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us." ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, ⁷we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me." You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

In this scripture is the word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God.

FROM THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

Luke 4: 1-13 (*Inclusive Text*)

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for 40 days.

During that time Jesus ate nothing and at the end was famished.

Then the devil said,

'If you are the One born of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.'

But Jesus replied,

'Scripture says: No one lives on bread alone.'

Then leading Jesus to a height,

the devil showed him in a moment of time all the nations of the world and said,

'I will give you all this power and the glory of these for it has been committed to me, and I give it to anyone I choose.'

'Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours.'

But Jesus answered,

'Scripture says: you must worship your God, whom alone you must serve.'

Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple.
'If you are the One born of God', the devil said,
'throw yourself down from here, for Scripture says,
"God will put angels in charge of you to guard you,"
and again,
"On their hands they will bear you up in case
you will hurt your foot against a stone".
But Jesus answered the devil,
'It has been said, "You must not put your God to the test".
Having exhausted all these ways of tempting Jesus,
the devil left to return at a more opportune time.
Thank you, God, for your word to us today!
Thank you, God, for Christ Jesus, a living Word!

REFLECTION:

The Wilderness Test: Luke 4:1-13

This is probably one of the most intimate passages in the Gospels. It must have personally been shared by Jesus with his disciples. In this story Jesus tells us of his struggle as to what kind of Messiah he wanted to be. It is full of symbolism: 40 days, the number of days set aside for lent in the weeks leading to the Easter events. It is a story that challenges us to ask how are we going to spend the next 40 days of lent.

Only two gospels give us the details of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. John leaves it out altogether and Mark sums it up in two sentences, that leaves it the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. They give us the details of what the Satan said and what Jesus answered back. Satan is the translation of the Greek word "diabolos", meaning "the adversary". He is shown to be Biblically literate and challenges Jesus in a very insightful way as to what kind of Messiah or Gods messenger he was going to be. Jesus' answers show a clear understanding of what it means to be faithful to his teaching and healing mission.

All this takes place in the wilderness or desert, a place loved by the mystics, a place of learning, a place of what it means to survive, a place of little or no food, no earthly power, no special protection, or as a one commentator puts it "just a Bible-quoting devil and a whole bunch of sand". Wildernesses are familiar to us all as a metaphor and real experiences. They come in many forms such as times of crisis, times of agony and discovery, places we don't want to visit, long periods of loneliness or sickness, they are real places and can be reality based, spirit filled, and life changing.

Reading the Jesus story of the temptations we find:

- How did he end up in the wilderness? The Spirit led him
- What kept him going? He was full of the Holy Spirit
- What did he live on? Fasting but probably did drink water to survive.
- How long was he there? A long time more than 40 days
- How did he feel at the end of it? He was starving

In this place of no distractions Jesus learns to trust the Spirit that led him there, he would emerge with a kind of clarity and understanding that he could not have experienced in any other place.

I have in my mind the desert of the Sinai where literally nothing grows, when I visited it in 1987, it was like being in a giant sand and rock pit, the base of the mountains looked like rubble because there was no rivers to wash the soil away and yet there in the middle of it all was a small oasis called Saint Catherine's Monastery. A place of pilgrimage and spiritual retreat, supposedly the site of where Moses saw the burning bush. Wilderness is a Biblical place of learning. A place where you do without in order to gain a clarity of thinking, a place of wisdom, a place of insight and place of faithful connection with God.

We are entering a time of lent, (an English word meaning spring because that is the time of the year in the northern hemisphere), it goes from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday and is traditionally set aside as a time where people are challenged to do without, a time of fasting, spiritual self-appraisal and a time of prayer and preparation for the Easter events.

For Hebrew People they saw the adversary Satan (mentioned in the book of Job) as presenting alternatives suggestions.

There was considerable positive content in them.

Collective positive Hopes and Images.

It seemed possible that Jesus entertained these as genuine possibilities.

With each of these he struggled.

He rejected each one.

They were not seen by him as evil when presented but less than the best in terms of faithfulness to the Gospel.

He was searching for to be true to his calling.

To choose is a function of consciousness

Satan – becomes God's freedom in us.

the prodder, the pursuer

the adversary, the accuser.

What did Jesus reject and what were the implications of the rejection for the future.

1. Jesus rejects the need to meet personal needs

Jesus was personally hungry – He had been fasting for 40 days .

Luke paints a human picture of Jesus – When hungry turn a stone to Bread.

Initially a personal challenge, but Jesus would also put the emphasis on feeding people – restoring the Kingdom as the Place of Milk and Honey not by a miracle but by organising people into groups and asking the disciples to feed the people themselves, but that is another sermon completely.

It is a question of means and ends.

What is the end – people being satisfied.

Very laudable.

After all scripture says – Feed the hungry, the widow and foreigner.

but Jesus rejects this **because of the means**.

The means suggested by Satan – Miracle.

Whereas the means is already clearly set out in scripture.

In quoting Deut 8:3

He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Jesus is not saying bread is unimportant but that God clearly spells out how to answer the problem of hunger by being faithful to God and the Gospel.

Like Ghandi – Feeding oneself is a physical problem.

Feeding the hungry is a spiritual problem.

Read / see Is 58 verses 3-7.

³“Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. ⁴Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. ⁵Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? ⁶Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Temptation to push the responsibility of ending human hunger away from human beings and onto God.

It is not God’s problem but ours.

Not by miracles

but by the painful process of analysing, changing economics, motivating, caring, acting

This is what Jesus meant when he talked about Word of God.

2. The temptation of Power and Wealth

What is the basis of your Power and Wealth?

Luke spells this out in verse 6.

The point at issue is what sort of Leader is Jesus going to be.

Politics is the art of the possible, organising the power of the people. By money and resources.

By this definition every human organisation is political – even Churches and Governments.

The point here is not whether Jesus would be a political leader but what sort of leader? or what form of leadership should it take?

Satan suggested Jesus used the arbitrary power of a politician – political power. “All the kingdom of the earth”

For Jesus it was different.

The road to power leads to a life and ministry among people.

Servant power.

Matt 9:36 “Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them” why “Because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd”

About being a servant leader empowering others.

Healing – brokenness.

Forgiving – encouraging new life.

To accept power on any other base would be to surrender to personal responsibility.

Jesus and the early church worked through people, small groups and open homes.

eg preparation for Palm Sunday.

Preparations for the Passover feast.

The home, the place of hospitality and protection.

Jesus wants all human beings to take responsibility for the material circumstances of their lives. Leadership is what helps people to achieve this --- see the feeding of 5000.

Note biblical quote – Deut 6:13 The worship of God. Not materialism, power, prestige etc

3. Temptation to attract Sensation Seekers.

Challenge – to throw self off Temple because you can have Angelic Protectors.

Such an act would have won an immediate following.

As I have said before to be an effective leader Jesus needed to put himself in the same situation as the people he leads.

Same vulnerability.

To claim supernatural Angelic protection would be to cut himself off from the people.

This is the point of the incarnation, Emmanuel which means that God is with us”.

To put God to the test would be to undo his very humanity.

To claim special status
privilege
power

I discovered this approach as very real when working with people overseas and with Aboriginal Communities. Much of the church and Governmental approach can be paternalistic. "I know what is best for them."

In all of the temptations/tests we find a very human Jesus who identified with people.

Who by this identification is committed to the Way of service that will end up on a cross.

We must not be tempted to take short cuts.

This is very pertinent for us today.

Do we claim special status, as Christians?

Do we expect God will look after our physical needs?

Do we expect God will give us power and wealth? We call it Prosperity Theology.

Do we expect that God will perform miracles when we are sick or are in need?

No Jesus expect us to be servant leaders.

We are in the world and have to choose to be like Jesus.

Like Jesus, we are people of the way, living the Christian life, knowing that the greatest gift is that no matter what happens to us, "God is with us" and will not desert us and we will certainly not be "tempted beyond our power to resist".

Silence for Personal Reflection

HYMN Our Lord, You Were Sent by Carolyn Gillette

Tune - FOUNDATION 11.11.11.11 ("How Firm a Foundation" TIS 578)

1. Our Lord, you were sent to a place wild and vast
To ponder your mission, to pray and to fast;
Then hungry and weary, you faced night and day
The subtle temptations to turn from God's way.
2. How could it be wrong to want bread on the shelf?
To seek, in one's serving, to first serve one's self?
But by God's own word you remained ever sure:
It's only in God that our lives are secure.
3. How could it be wrong to step out and to dare,
To prove with great drama the depths of God's care?

But you knew God's word, true since all time began:
It's wrong to expect God to work by our plan.

4. How could it be wrong to just once bow the knee,
To shake hands with sin to achieve victory?
Yet you made it clear that no matter the cost:
Your path was obedience, your way was the cross.

5. Our Lord, in your struggle you chose to obey;
God's word filled your heart and you trusted God's way.
Now risen, you save us from sins that destroy;
You give us your Spirit, your peace and your joy.

SHARING OUR COMMUNITY LIFE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

OFFERING and OFFERTORY PRAYER

God of grace and mercy, we give thanks for Jesus' witness to the power of your Spirit, guiding and strengthening him in times of testing. We offer these gifts and the service of our lives as tangible signs of our thanksgiving. As we embark on our Lenten journey, guide and strengthen us with the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus wherever he leads us. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

HYMN TIS 684: "Love will be our Lenten calling"

1
Love will be our Lenten calling,
love to shake and shatter sin,
waking every closed, cold spirit,
stirring new life deep within,
till the quickened heart remembers
what our Easter birth can mean.

2
Peace will be our Lenten living
as we turn for home again,
longing for the words of pardon,
stripping off old grief and pain,
till we stand, restored and joyful,
with the Church on Easter day.

3
Truth will be our Lenten learning:
hear the Crucified One call!
Shadowed by the Saviour's passion,
images and idols fall,
and, in Easter's holy splendour,
God alone is all in all.

REPORT BACK BY THE CHILDREN

WORD OF MISSION AND BLESSING

Go into this week secure in the knowledge that
the mercy of God enfolds you
the love of Jesus Christ holds you fast
the power of the Holy Spirit keeps you strong.

ASCRPTION

TIS 782 “Go now in peace”
Go now in peace, go now in peace,
may the love of God surround you
everywhere, everywhere you may go.

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