

# Order of Worship

St. Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark  
17<sup>th</sup> March 2019, Lent 2 – Rev Dr Robert Stringer

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## LENT 2C

### THEME; The Fox and the Hen

**INTROIT TIS 390:** “Jesus is Lord of all the earth” Verses 1  
*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.

### 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.**

**INTROIT TIS 390:** “Jesus is Lord of all the earth”  
*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.

3  
We have been crucified with Christ;  
now we shall live for ever.

4  
God has proclaimed his gracious gift:  
new life for all! Alleluia!

5  
Come, let us praise the living God,  
joyfully sing to our Saviour

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** *After a song of St Anselm*

Jesus, as a mother, you gather your people to you:

**You are gentle with us as a mother with her children.**

Often you weep over our sins and pride:

**Tenderly you draw us forward from self hatred and judgement:**

You comfort us in our sorrow and bind up our wounds:

**In sickness, you nurse us and give us life.**

Jesus, by your dying, we are born to new life:

**By your anguish and labour, we come forth in joy.**

Lord Jesus, in your mercy, heal us:

**In your love and tenderness, remake us.**

In your compassion, bring grace and forgiveness:

**In the beauty of heaven, may your Love prepare us.**

**HYMN TIS 547:** "Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart"

1  
Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art -  
thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

2  
Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;  
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;  
thou my great Father, thy child let me be;  
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

3  
Be thou my armour, my sword for the fight,  
be thou my dignity, thou my delight;  
thou my soul's shelter and thou my high tower:  
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

4  
Riches I scorn and the world's empty praise,  
thou my inheritance, now and always:  
thou and thou only the first in my heart;  
high King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

5  
High King of heaven, after victory won,  
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be my vision, O ruler of all.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

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

**HYMN TIS 236:** "Jesus' hands were kind hands"

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.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PRAYER OF CONFESSION** *Moira B Laidlaw*

The apostle Paul says: "Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us."  
Is it possible to claim these words as our own and repeat them as our words?  
Let's have a time of silence where we think about these words and their relevance for our lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we hear these words of Paul, and know that his life was spent living and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ not only to the people of his day, but to people in every age since. He could invite people not only do as he said, but to do as he did.

When we are happy to tell others to do as we say, but want the freedom to do as we choose, even if that means surrendering some of our Christian values;

**Forgive us, O God.**

When we strive to imitate the lifestyles of the rich and famous, and ignore the plight of those who are poor and the powerless;

**Forgive us, O God.**

When we look to other than Jesus Christ as the source of our standards;

**Forgive us, O God.**

When Jesus weeps over our behaviour even as he wept over Jerusalem;

**Forgive us, O God.**

God of grace and truth, we remember Jesus' commitment to travel towards the cross to give true and everlasting meaning to the depth of divine love.

Empower us with the Holy Spirit to deepen our commitment to follow Jesus,

even when that means being ridiculed or persecuted, or sharing in the struggles and sufferings of others. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

*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**

The Book of Genesis. Chapter 15. Verses 1 to 12 & 17 to 18

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. ....

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

The Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians. Chapter 3. Verse 17 to Chapter 4. Verse 1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is

destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

THE GOSPEL according to St.Luke. Chapter 13. Verses 31 to 35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

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

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

**SERMON**

## **A Community that shows the Compassion of God Luke 13:31-35**

Sir Stanley Spencer 1891-1950 is a famous British painter of the Neo-Romantic School who has done a wonderful series of paintings of Jesus in the Wilderness. See [www.wikiart.org/en/stanley-spencer](http://www.wikiart.org/en/stanley-spencer).



This picture [www.wikiart.org/en/stanley-spencer/christ-in-the-wilderness-the-hen](http://www.wikiart.org/en/stanley-spencer/christ-in-the-wilderness-the-hen) depicts a very thoughtful Jesus in the wilderness observing the antics of a mother hen with her chicks. A precursor to Jesus' use of the image in today's reading from Luke gospel 13:31-35, this picture is but a small vignette of Jesus reflecting on his move to go to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem features strongly in Luke's scheme of things.  
Jesus laments over Jerusalem Lk 19:41-44,  
Jesus calls on the daughters of Jerusalem 23:28-31.

Jerusalem is used 29 times in Luke's gospel, 49 times in the rest of the New Testament. These references to Jerusalem and the details that they allude to, help us to date the Gospel as having been written after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Mark has the paradigm of Jesus' ministry as having taken place in Galilee and then Jesus ends up going to Jerusalem. Luke on the other hand draws parallels between Jesus' ministry and the church. Jerusalem being the centre of the early church.

In Luke Jesus has a special ministry to Gentiles, women, foreigners with stories such as: The Good Samaritan, the widow's son, Martha and Mary, the Widow and the Judge, the lost Son, the Shrewd Manager, tax collector such as Zacchaeus.

In Luke we have a description of Jerusalem as “the place of the prophets” along with references to Pharisees and Herod.

Let me paint a picture of the situation of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. Some insight is acknowledged in the words of today’s gospel reading. “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you” or “Jerusalem who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to it.” Obviously those sorts of practices were being carried out by the likes of Herod and so some Pharisees, who may have been sympathetic to Jesus and his mission, are aware of these activities and seek to warn Jesus, or maybe they hoped that Jesus would move on in response.

It would certainly not be called “prophet killing” but it would likely today have been called “keeping the peace” or “maintaining the status quo” or “maintaining the sanctity of religion” or “getting rid of terrorists.” Even today we cringe at the use of these types of words. Jerusalem at the time would have been a hotbed of these sorts of activities and, just as today, the people would have acquiesced to Herod’s agenda and the iron fist of the Roman Garrison. The problem is that with such powerful rulers the ordinary people acknowledge the power and are silenced.

Referring to Herod as a ‘fox’ is a reference to the part that Herod plays of cooperating with the powers such as the Roman Garrison and the Chief priests and religious authorities. Not that Herod had anything against Jesus, in fact Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate as if he could not find fault with him. Jerusalem is a hotbed of Jewish nationalism and rebellion, rather than a place where the people listen to the Word of God and seek to live by the Torah/Scriptures. Jesus observes that because of this rebellion God will leave Jerusalem to its own devices and a history that ultimately ends in its destruction in 70AD. This is one of the reasons to date the Gospel as post 70AD.

v 34 “Jerusalem Jerusalem, you kill the prophets, you stone the messengers God has sent you. How many times have I wanted to put my arms around your people just as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you would not let me, and so your Temple will be abandoned. v35 I assure you that you will not see me until the time comes when you say “God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Perhaps the latter reference refers to the Psalm Sunday parade.

What could Luke’s message be for a thoughtful church during Lent?

What kind of congregation/church are we going to be?

Maybe this could be paraphrased as:

**“The Church The Church. You silence the prophets, the messengers of God who make the connections between the real world and my**

**presence. I am the God who takes the initiative and wants to put my arm around people and comfort them ... Just as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you are not willing to be a loving and caring community in this way.”**

A real challenge.

Are we the kind of congregation that understands that message and seeks to be a loving and caring community following the way of Jesus?

To understand this I want to take you on a quick walk through the Scriptures.

**First the story of Abraham, one of today’s readings.**

This is a story of a Covenant God.

A story that gives us an insight into the character of God.

Covenant subverts our perceptions of God.

God is NOT: - omnipotent, everything known in advance, self serving, remote, isolated, impassive, protector, serene, irrelevant.

We have a Covenant God who breaks the silence and wants a relationship.

Covenant – not a relation of control but of liberation and cooperation.

A God who embraces people in partnership.

For example in today’s Abraham Story.

V1 Yahweh – God of compassion. Makes the first move.

God sees the dilemma of Sarah’s barrenness, very crucial to people at the time who depended on having large families to provide labour and future generations.

V 2-3 A God who doesn’t mind if we argue or protest.

Double protest –   No children  
                                  No land to inherit

V 4-5 Yahweh responds: God will enable

                  You will have your own son who will inherit.

                  Your will have numerous descendants as many as the stars in the sky.

V6 Abraham’s acceptance is not based on a human response but on a grace and God’s brooding care. God makes promises.

The result is that Abraham becomes a man of faith.

And this was counted as righteous.

God was pleased with him and accepted him and continues to be his guide keeping God's promises.

### **The example of Jeremiah and his community.**

Jeremiah 31: 33-34 "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: "I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people."

A) A community of People who live by the Word of God (Torah)

B) A community built in knowledge of God.

(i) Where everyone can know God, especially the poor and the disadvantaged

(ii) A community that experiences and practises forgiveness.

Forgiveness not just spiritual but real change when things go wrong.

Like Jesus when he talked about Millstone around neck, drown self.

C) A community that shows the compassion of God in the world.

A community that ... Has energy and courage for mission

A community that values its members

A community that brings strong and weak together

Example: The Call of Moses in Ex 3: I am the God who sees the oppression of my people in Egypt and I want you to lead them.

### **The example of Israel when they returned from exile in Is 56:**

After the people of Israel return from exile in Babylon they were to be a community that included eunuchs and foreigners, many of whom probably returned with the people. Eunuchs were banned from being members of the worshipping community Dt 23:1.

The OT scholar Walter Brueggemann in his book *Using God's Resources wisely: Isaiah and Urban Possibility* affirms the importance of this story saying that this is the clearest and perhaps the only case in which "a torah provision of Moses is explicitly violated for the sake of the future of the community." He makes no apology that the application of this oracle is the "powerful practice of inclusiveness" and does include the homosexual and "stands against our deep worry about the otherness of the 'other'." This oracle is a high point of the universalism of the Jewish faith that is picked up in Is 56:7 where a new vision is presented of the temple being a place of worship for all nations. It is important to note how this verse is picked up by Jesus and quoted during the cleansing of the Temple in Mk 11:17. This model raises the possibility of a nation inclusive of gay and lesbian people who love Christ. If this was the process within the written tradition of the Old Testament then it gives us a model for the church today.

So what are we talking about, a community of people modelled after the person of Jesus, who set his face to go to Jerusalem.

A community modelled on the ministry of Jesus himself.

We are called to be such a community today where:

- 1) God takes the initiative, for example the incarnation of Jesus as a baby.
- 2) A God who is willing to listen to our arguments and protests and who we know is in solidarity with us as we struggle to be a faithful Christian presence today.
- 3) A God who gives hope and is with people in the most extreme circumstances.
- 4) A God who brings into being a new community the church, a community who has a built in knowledge of God in their hearts.
- 5) A God who calls us to be a community like Jesus and cares for the people especially the poor, the outcast, eunuchs, and the hurting.

And so when we hear words like: “The Church The Church. You silence the prophets, the messengers of God who make the connections between the real world and my presence. I am the God who takes the initiative and wants to put my arm around people and comfort them ... Just as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you are not willing to be a loving and caring community in this way.”

We don't cringe but respond, yes Lord we want to be like a hen gathering its chicks in the way we care for people and won't let you down.

**HYMN TIS 474:** “Here in this place new light is streaming”

1  
Here in this place new light is streaming,  
Now is the darkness vanished away,  
See, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,  
Brought to you here in the light of this day.  
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken,  
Gather us in, the blind and th lame,  
Call to us now, and we shall awaken,  
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

2  
We are the young, our lives are a mystery,  
We are the old, who yearn for your face,  
We have been sung throughout all of history,  
Called to be light to the whole human race.  
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,

Gather us in, the proud and the strong,  
Give us a heart, so meek and so lowly,  
Give us the courage to enter the song.

3

Here we will take of the wine and the water,  
Here we will take the bread of new birth;,  
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters,  
Call us anew to be salt of the earth.  
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,  
Give us to eat the bread that is you;  
Nourish us well, and teach us to fashion  
Lives that are holy, and hearts that are true..

4

Not in the dark of buildings confining,  
Not in some heaven light years away,  
But here in this space, the new light is shining,  
Now is the kingdom, now is the day.  
Gather us in and hold us forever;  
Gather us in, and make us your own;  
Gather us in, all people together,  
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

## **SHARING OUR COMMUNITY LIFE**

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

#### **OFFERING and 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**

### **REPORT BACK BY THE CHILDREN**

#### **HYMN 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.

### **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 781** “Father bless us as we go”

Father, bless us as we go,  
Jesus, walk beside us.  
Holy Spirit, guide us

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