

Order of Worship

St. Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

31st March 2019, Lent 4 – Rev Dr Robert Stringer

THEME; The Prodigal Family

INTROIT TIS 703: “As the deer pants”

As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after you.

You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

You alone are my strength, my shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.

You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

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:

Today as we hear once again the story of the prodigal son,
We celebrate the Love of God,
the patience of God.

We celebrate our ability to come to our senses and choose life.
We celebrate the wonderful forgiveness of God.
When we are confronted by that part of ourselves

that doesn't always understand what it means to be part of the
family of God's people.

Let us celebrate our community with each other as the people of
God.

Let us worship God.

HYMN TIS 217: " Love divine all loves excelling"

1

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

2

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,

never more thy temples leave:
thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

3

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be,
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

OPENING PRAYER

God of outstretched arms,
you welcome us to this place.
You invite us to experience forgiveness,
community, reconciliation,
and an overwhelming sense of the love
that you pour out upon all people.
May we feel that love in this time of worship,
may we leave this place committed
to sharing your love in our world.
In Christ's name we pray. Amen

A WORD FOR THE CHILDREN

SONG: "God loves you and I love you" Altogether Now 72
(sorry, words not available this week - Franklyn)

Preparation for the PRAYER OF CONFESSION from PSALM 32 (a
version for today)

A real sense of contentment comes to the person from whom the burden of rebellion against the compassionate One has been lifted, whom the holy One has acquitted.

I kept silent; I hoped it would all go away;
but my body grew old before its time,
as I struggled with the load I carried.
Day and night, day and night,
and my tongue was hard and cracked,
like a drought-baked paddock.
But then I came to my senses,
and admitting that I could not blot out my wrongs.
I said, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD",
and then you lifted its weight from me
Our following in the way of Jesus is flawed
yet still we are assured of the liberating embrace
of your loving kindness.

Silence

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

From the Jewish Scriptures

The Book of Joshua. Chapter 5. Verses 9 to 12

The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal[a] to this day.

10 While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

From the letters of the early Church

The 2nd Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Chapter 5. Verses 16 to 21

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

From the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

THE GOSPEL according to St. Luke. Chapter 15. Verses 1-3, 11b to 32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” 3 Then he told them this parable -

“There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with[c] the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called

your son.’[d] 22 But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31 Then the father[e] said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

REFLECTION:

The Prodigal Family - Luke 15:1-3,11-32

Commonly known as the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Tells the story of three people:

The Prodigal Son

The Loving Father

The Elder Son

And a community

This parable is told in the context of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin.

It is important to note the context: The crowd included tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees and the Scribes were grumbling about the way that Jesus was having meals with sinners. It was a problem of association with the wrong sort of people.

This parable explains why Jesus welcomes such people, the struggle to bring such people to faith and a parable of the love and grace of God.

There are four parts to this story:

1. The nature of the younger son
2. The loving nature of the Father
3. The nature of the Elder brother
4. The nature of the Community of God.

This is a story about a community, originally a small farming village, closely knit with traditional roles of family and inheritances.

1. The nature of the Younger Son:

A young lad in the community wanted to get away from it all and experience the big wide world. He asked for his inheritance in a way that it could be converted into cash. He wanted to travel, maybe he wasn't happy as the younger son always being treated

as second in line. He wanted to go off to the city and even travel to foreign lands. He was an adventurer. It was an experimental time, living indulgently and enjoying the exotic life in a different place. It takes courage to go on such a journey. However in time things didn't go well, especially when there was a famine in that foreign land and all of his resources had been used up. He ended up feeding pigs.

For Jews feeding pigs was the lowest of the low as they considered pig as unclean animals and not fit for human consumption in good Jewish households. Typically this would have been accompanied by real shame and sadness, a lot of reflecting, advice-giving, the breakdown of relationships, loss of communication and reflection of what had been lost in terms of family and village security.

In this story the younger son "comes to his senses"
He had hurt the father
Made mistakes,
Broken relationships
Got into trouble
Ended up in the pits feeding pigs
he had hit rock bottom

In this situation he acknowledged his mistakes, his brokenness, lost dignity, lost identity. And he decided to take responsibility for his own life again, forgo his pride, make new decisions, and return to what he knew was a safe place in the family and village.

He was hungry and alone and he realised that:

1. that he had lost his inheritance,
2. It was wrong to spend it in a foreign land,
3. He would not be able to look after his father in his old age, and
4. He missed the security of the family and village life.

His solution was to return home and express deep regret, ask for forgiveness, and ask to become a “hired servant” on his family farm. In that way he could re-enter the village, pay back some of the lost inheritance, regain some self esteem.

2. The nature of the loving Father

The father had never given up on seeing his younger son again. Every time he saw a stranger walking on the road leading up to the farmhouse he was moved to look carefully to see who was coming. The son was always on his mind as to what he was doing and when he would see him again. Maybe there was a good story there like the parable of the talents. Maybe he knew his son well and was always concerned that he might not do well.

Finally there on the horizon was the son with his peculiar way of walking. He could recognise him anywhere. The Father acts out of cultural character. He is out in the fields and runs to welcome his son. He hears his confession and contrition and the son’s desire to start again and rebuild the relationship by asking to become a hired servant.

The father responds spontaneously as he publicly kisses the son, re-establishes the Father-Son relationship and seeing the sight of his clothes, he orders the best robe to be found, sandals and a ring so that when he enters the village he is not in disgrace but is covered with the dignity of a long lost son. The father probably sensed what had happened and orders the signs of reincorporation into the family, a ring for his finger as a sign of inheritance, sandals on his feet as a sign of a free man not a slave, and then to top it all he orders the killing of the fatted calf so that there could be a feast where the whole village was invited just like it might have been if he had turned up with all his wealth intact.

An extravagant display of forgiveness, unconditional acceptance and re- integration into the family and village.

This is a parable of what it means in our society to constantly be on the lookout to affirm people who are on the edge of our society.

The need to affirm them and their humanity, to show that we believe in them being part of the community, encouraging them to come to the realisation that they are part of the human family or village or city.

The need to celebrate diversity and incorporation into society.

3. The nature of the Elder son

All is not well. The Elder son was incensed at the injustice of it all. How dare the Father overlook the condition of the younger brother who had gone away and returned as a vagrant loser. How dare he be so extravagant in welcoming him home as if nothing had happened. How dare he prepare a feast and invite the whole village. He had not heard his younger brother's confession and his desire to return as a hired servant. All he saw was extravagance and celebration and, like the Pharisees, he was critical of a situation where the loyal family member is overlooked when life changing events are celebrated and the outcast or lost are re-incorporated into the community. He ends up with self-imposed judgmentalism just like the Pharisees.

Vs28-30 The Elder brother becomes angry and because of that anger and resentment he is changed from the insider to the outcast by his own actions.

He publicly insults and humiliates the father

He addresses the father without respect.

He speaks of himself as a slave and not a son and heir

He accuses the Father of favouritism

He refuses to acknowledge his brother calling him “this son of yours”.

Accuses the brother of living with harlots and prostitutes.

Accuses that Father of wanton extravagance.

The nature of the Father’s response

The Father speaks with love and affection of both sons,

Tells the Elder son that his inheritance is still intact,

Invites the Elder son to join the festivities.

He emphasises the change that has come over the younger son and the importance of life changing decisions to return to the security of the family.

This is the vision of the true nature of the Human Family, called the family of God, or as Jesus taught the “Kingdom of God.”

Everyone is welcome and there is celebration when people who have been sidelined for whatever reason, racism, sexuality, poverty, religion, criminality, status, wealth, and culture are all re-incorporated.

The final picture is one of hope with the father asking the Elder son to join the celebration.

We have all of these characteristics in each one of us today.

We have all of these characteristics in the Church today.

Which character do you identify with? The Younger son, the Loving Father, the Elder Son?

Maybe we are a mixture of each of these depending on the circumstances and the people who turn up in our churches. Do we provide crumbs for people who are living in a foreign land? How do we celebrate diversity in our Church today? Multicultural church? Multi-Faith community? Do we see the people at the

mosques as our family? How could we celebrate together? What does that mean for us in Lent?

Poem: The human experience of lostness.

Is an experience
of lost identity
of lost dignity
of cultural alienation
of having lost one's way
This person was important
Broken with family and clan
wasted money recklessly
From a good start
living became losing
until he was found with pigs
wishing to fill himself with the food that pigs eat.
Just rubbish people
outcasts
waste of time to ask
Who am I?
What worth am I?
The answer is a foregone conclusion
Hopelessness is a reality
Lost in a bottle
Where am I going?
That is a mad question people ask
When suddenly they look at others
at the pigs
At the country
and begin to feel themselves
As did the younger son in the sty.
Is this the life

I want for myself and my family?
Why even.....
I will get up
patiently slowly along with
offering them and their humanity
believing in them
encouraging them to come to themselves
encouraging them to take action
among themselves
Helping them to say "I will get up"
Sharing the human family resources.

HYMN TIS 242: "I danced in the morning"

1

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,
at Bethlehem I had my birth:

*Dance then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the dance, said he;
and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

2

I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,
but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John,
they came with me and the dance went on:

3

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:
the holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,
and they left me there on a cross to die:

4

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;
but I am the dance and I still go on:

5

They cut me down and I leap up high,
I am the life that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you as you live in me:
I am the Lord of the dance, said he:

SHARING OUR COMMUNITY LIFE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

OFFERING and OFFERTORY PRAYER:

God who makes all things new,
you have entrusted to us
a ministry of reconciliation.
Empowered by your Spirit
may we use our gifts and our living
exercising that ministry
in Jesus' name. Amen.

HYMN TIS 686: "Lord Jesus we belong to you"

1

Lord Jesus, we belong to you,
you live in us, we live in you;
we live and work for you -
because we bear your name.

2 Help us receive each other, Lord,
for you receive the least of us
and come to us in them -

because we bear your name.

3 Bless those who give us any gift
because they know that we are yours;
reward them with your grace -
because we bear your name.

4 Let us acknowledge those as friends
who use your name to right a wrong,
but have not joined us yet -
because we bear your name.

5 Let nothing that we do or say
offend the weak so that they fall
and lose their faith in you -
because we bear your name.

6 Keep us from missing out on life;
give hands that help, and single sight,
and feet that walk your way -
because we bear your name.

7 You are the salt that cleanses us,
so clean us out, and make us fit
for common life with you -
because we bear your name.

BENEDICTION

Go into this week
brimming over with the grace of God,
nourished by the love of Jesus Christ,
implanted with the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

ASCRIPTION TIS 779: “May the feet of God walk with you”

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.

May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.

May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.

May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.

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