

Order of Worship

St. Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

2nd June 2019, Easter 7c – Rev Dr Robert Stringer

THEME; The unity of all things in God's love

INTROIT TIS 390 "Give thanks to the risen Lord" Verse 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.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

The joy of the companion Christ be with you all.

And also with you

See what wonderful thing it is, when all people can live together in unity

Though we have many differences, we are members of one body in Christ Jesus.

If one part of the body hurts, then the rest of the body shares its pain.

If one part of the body is successful, all of the body shares its happiness.

Let us worship the Holy God who brings us together in love

HYMN TIS 153: "God is love, let heav'n adore him"

1

God is love, let heav'n adore him;
God is love, let earth rejoice;
let creation sing before him,
and exalt him with one voice.
God, who laid the earth's foundation,

he who spread the heavens above,
and who breathes through all creation
God is love, eternal Love.

2

God is love, and gently enfolding
all the world in one embrace,
with unfailing grasp is holding
every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,
then they find that selfsame aching
deep within the heart of God.

3

God is love, and, though with blindness
sin afflicts our human hearts,
God's eternal lovingkindness
holding, guiding, grace imparts.
Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is love, so love for ever
o'er the universe must reign.

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal God, we give thanks and praise for Jesus' preparedness to show us your true nature and your true character - for in Jesus' words we hear the resonance of your voice, and in his deeds we see the imprint of your hands. We give thanks that Jesus' presence disclosed a new reality at work in the world - the reality of your kingdom O God, where what was broken is mended, what was afflicted is relieved, what was bound is set free and what was excluded is included. We pray that our worship here today will enable us to catch a glimpse of your kingdom, to hear the resonance of your voice, to know the imprint of your hand on our lives and to experience the breath of your Spirit in our bodies. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

A WORD FOR THE CHILDREN

AS ONE VOICE 130: ""They'll know we are Christians by our love..."

1. We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

2. We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.

3. We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride.

4. All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,
And all praise to Christ Jesus, his only Son,

And all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one.

WE SEND OUT THE YOUNG PEOPLE

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

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

(Liturgy prepared by the Christian Conference of Asia)

Let us pray : In the midst of hatred that divides people of different nations, ethnic groups, classes, religions and gender

God, forgive us.

In the midst of our difficulty in accepting each other and in respecting our differences

God, forgive us

In the midst of the covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own

God, forgive us

In the midst of the greediness which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth.

God, forgive us

In the midst of our envy of the welfare and happiness of others.

God, forgive us

In the midst of our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugees and the migrant workers.

God, forgive us

In the midst of practices which dishonour the bodies of men, women and children.

God, forgive us

In the midst of pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God.

God, forgive us

(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 HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 16. Verses 16 to 34

One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the

innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

In this scripture is the word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God.

FROM THE EARLY CHRISTIAN LETTERS

The Book of Revelation, Chapter 22: 12 to 14, 16 to 17

"See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

In this scripture is the word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God.

FROM THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

According to St. John, Chapter 17. Verses 20 to 26

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

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

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

REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

Jailer at Philippi Acts 16: 16-34

Have you ever wondered why we baptise children?

Today's reading from Acts can give us a clue.

Personal story – A few years ago I visited India I was most surprised to find that there was a hierarchy of beggars. Some beggars are much better at attracting money because of the severity of their physical disfigurement. Some of these beggars were exploited by men who used them to obtain an income at the beggar's expense.

This was very similar to the situation that Paul discovered when he healed a slave girl who was possessed by a spirit. That spirit was used by men who had turned the girl into a fortune-teller. Paul and Silas challenged the right of the men to use the girl for commercial gain. They freed her from the spirit and restored her self-respect.

Those men with commercial interest reacted angrily and had Paul and Silas immediately arrested. They were tried in what we would call a kangaroo court, beaten and put in stocks in the middle of the prison. Paul and Silas responded by holding a prayer meeting and sharing the gospel. They reflected the joy of being followers of Jesus.

Then there was a great earthquake, the prison walls were shaken and the prisoners could have escaped. As a consequence, the jailer who was responsible for the prisoners, thinking the prisoners had escaped was about to kill himself.

Paul said "Don't harm yourself. We are here."

The jailer amazed that Paul and Silas had not taken the opportunity to escape, fell trembling at their feet and asked – "What must I do to be saved?"

Paul responded by saying "believe in the Lord Jesus, you and your family" and he told the story about Jesus and his teaching.

The jailer responded by taking Paul and Silas home, washing their wounds. Then the jailer and his whole household was baptised because they were filled with joy. The household probably included his wife, children, servants, slaves, grandparents, and others. I believe that this is the model for infant baptism. It is also a model of what it means to witness to that joy of following Jesus, and led to the beginning of church in Philippi.

Let us look at some of this in detail –

A model for witnessing

In today's story we begin with Paul and Silas sharing the Gospel with Lydia – a seller of purple cloth. She was a wealthy businesswoman and again we see her responding by immediately offering hospitality.

The next day we see Paul and Silas being very concerned for the plight of a young girl. She was a soothsayer who it was believed could give oracles to guide people about the future. She was probably someone who had been violated by some kind of trauma in her early life and this had left her somehow sensitive to the spiritual forces that surrounded her. She had fallen into the hands of unscrupulous businessmen who used her to make money. Paul cured her of what we would probably call "madness," and restored her to health and wholeness.

The business people played on the anti-Semitic sentiment in Philippi, a Greek city, and whipped up an angry crowd that led to a hasty trial – what we would call a Kangaroo Court and so Paul and Silas ended up in prison. They were arrested and put in prison for doing good. That still happens today. I have been arrested and put in jail by the West Australian Government for sitting in protest with Aboriginal people.

In 1981, I and three other clergy from the Uniting Church and one Anglican priest were arrested and put in jail for protesting against the WA Government in support of the Nganganawilli Aboriginal people at Noonkanbah. We were arrested for “obstructing traffic” on a drive way onto the Noonkanbah property. In court we proved that the WA Government had not properly gazetted the road and so we were discharged without charge. We saw it as witnessing by the churches to the wider Australian community, about the injustices experienced by Aboriginal people.

Model for Infant Baptism

When the jailer asked for baptism, Paul shared with them the story and teaching about Jesus and then asked if they believed in Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord. We need to see this in the context of a communal patriarchal society. The jailer being convinced of the importance of the person and teaching of Jesus wants this life, not only for himself, but also for his whole household. The household probably included his wife, children, servants, slaves, grandparents, and others. In response the Jailer took compassion on Paul and Silas and gave them hospitality, washed their wounds and were baptized.

This was important because the jailer now saw everything in life, being supported by this commitment to Jesus:

- family life
- thinking
- actions
- caring
- behaviour
- friends
- relationships
-

He became what we now call a first-generation Christian. Someone who is converted by personal experience of Jesus Christ. By deciding as a family, the jailer indicated that this new life centred on Jesus, would be the goal for his entire household and so he asked for baptism not only for himself but for his whole household. He saw his family as a small newly formed Christian community where prayer, worship and other Christian activities are celebrated in worship and action.

I saw this reflected very clearly when I visited a village in West Papua. Every day the Grandfather of the household where I was staying, would hold morning and evening prayers and extra services on Sunday.

This is not new, as when I was in the Solomon Island there was at least one story of a headman of a village and all of the members of the village being baptised. The village Headman and the villagers erected a church where worship and the appropriate teaching and commitment to Jesus was the focus. As they say “it takes a whole village to bring up a child.” How much more is this true when the village is known as a Christian village. The children grow up with a strong knowledge of the Bible and are encouraged to make their commitment the Jesus when they are older.

So it is for us today. We know that the family is one of the greatest influences in the lives of our children. The adults of the family provide 24-hour modelling of how to live the Christian life. For this reason the Uniting Church encourages infant baptism. At the baptism service we ask parents to affirm their commitment to Jesus Christ and then ask them to commit to providing a Christian home and bring up the children in the life of the Church. In this way we ask our church families to be part of a Christian community and the Church’s witness in all the mission activities that we do in the community.

As we follow this model, our prayer and hope is that our children will become followers of Jesus. This is the model of the Uniting Church, Anglican, Catholic and many other churches. We seek to be followers of Jesus. Witnessing to the integrity of our faith and action. We don't leave it at just infant baptism. but finally our hope is that our children choose for themselves to follow Jesus, and the continuing witness of the church to Jesus Christ, and his call to reach out and be at mission in the community.

Let us commit ourselves as we sing about this commitment in the words of the Hymn -

1

In water we grow,
secure in the womb,
and speechlessly know
love's safety and room.
Baptizing and blessing
we publish for good
the freeing, caressing
safe keeping of God.

2

In water we wash:
the dirt of each day,
its trouble and rush
are carried away.
In Christ re-created
by love's cleansing art,
self-will and self-hatred
dissolve and depart.

3

In water we dive,
and cannot draw breath,
then surface alive,
rebounding from death.
Our old self goes under,
in Christ dead and drowned.
We rise, washed in wonder,
by love clad and crowned.

4

In water we dwell,
for by its deep flow
through bloodstream and cell,
we live, think, and grow.
Praise God, love outflowing,
whose well of new birth
baptizes our knowing,
and waters the earth

SHARING OUR COMMUNITY LIFE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in Heaven,
hallowed be you name.**

**Your Kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us 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 forever – Amen.**

OFFERING AND OFFERTORY PRAYER

Loving God, we praise you for linking our lives with yours through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. We offer these gifts as signs of our gratitude and our commitment to make your name known, and Christ's love visible through our worship, witness and service. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

HYMN TIS 785: "As the grains of wheat" (Song of Grace)

*As the grains of wheat once scattered on the hill
were gathered into one to become our bread:
so may all your people from all the ends of earth
be gathered into one in you.*

1. As this cup of blessing is shared within our midst,
may we share the presence of your love.
2. Let this be a foretaste of all that is to come
when all creation shares this feast with you.

THE CHILDREN REPORT BACK

THE HOLY COMMUNION

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 — 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. Each time you do this remember me.

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

This is cup is a symbol of my blood, which is soon to be shed for you. Each time you drink from this cup remember me. 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 recognise 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 passed.)

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, which we show to one another. It is 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.**AMEN.**

HYMN TIS 179: "Praise with joy the world's Creator"

1

Praise with joy the world's Creator,
God of justice, love and peace,
source and end of human knowledge,
force of greatness without cease.
Celebrate the Maker's glory,
power to rescue and release.

2

Praise the Son who feeds the hungry,
frees the captive, finds the lost,
heals the sick, upsets religion,
fearless both of fate and cost.
Celebrate Christ's constant presence --
Friend and Stranger, Guest and Host.

3

Praise the Spirit sent among us,
liberating truth from pride,
forging bonds where race or gender,
age or nation dare divide.
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure --
foolishness none dare deride.

4

Praise the Maker, Son and Spirit,
one God in community,
calling Christians to embody
oneness and diversity.
Thus the world shall yet believe, when
shown Christ's vibrant unity.

BENEDICTION:

May the protection of God surround you, the joy of Jesus infill you and the harmony of the Holy Spirit resound in and through your life. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

In the name of Christ. Amen

ASCRIPTION 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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The Opening prayer and Prayer of Confession by Moira B Laidlaw

The Communion: Canon of the Children of God from Woodstock Liturgies

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