

Order of Worship

St.Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

1st September 2019 – Rev Dr Robert Stringer

Pentecost 12C

THEME: Hospitality and Inclusion

INTROIT

We love the place, O God,
wherein thine honour dwells;
the joy of thine abode
all earthly joy excels.

We love the house of prayer,
wherein thy servants meet;
and thou, O Lord, art there
thy chosen flock to greet.

We love the word of life,
the word that tells of peace,
of comfort in the strife,
and joys that never cease.

We love to sing below
for mercies freely given;
but O we long to know
the triumph-song of heaven.

Lord Jesus, give us grace
on earth to love thee more,
in heaven to see thy face,
and with thy saints adore.

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 to proclaim, that Jesus is the Light of the World
We proclaim that Jesus Christ is the same today, tomorrow and for ever. Amen

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Based on Psalm 81:1,10-16*

Sing aloud to God our strength;

who delivered the people from slavery in Egypt.

People who turned away and followed the desires of their own hearts.

But God's yearning to nourish them – to feed them with the finest of wheat, and the sweetest of honey - never changed. We praise God who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

HYMN TIS 182: "Bring many names"

1

Bring many names, beautiful and good,
celebrate, in parable and story,
holiness in glory,
living, loving God.
Hail and hosanna!
bring many names!

2

Strong mother God, working night and day,
planning all the wonders of creation,
setting each equation,
genius at play:
Hail and hosanna,
strong mother God!

3

Warm father God, hugging every child,
feeling all the strains of human living,
caring and forgiving
till we're reconciled:
Hail and hosanna,
warm father God!

4

Old, aching God, grey with endless care,
calmly piercing evil's new disguises,
glad of good surprises,
wiser than despair:
Hail and hosanna,
old, aching God!

5

Young, growing God, eager, on the move,
saying no to falsehood and unkindness,
crying out for justice,
giving all you have:
Hail and hosanna,
young, growing God!

6

Great, living God, never fully known,
joyful darkness far beyond our seeing,
closer yet than breathing,
everlasting home:
Hail and hosanna,
great, living God!

PRAYER OF PRAISE AND ADORATION

FROM THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

The Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 2. Verses 4 to 13

Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?

They did not say, "Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?" I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, "Where is the LORD?" Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers^a transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit.

Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD, and I accuse your children's children. Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate,

says the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

In this scripture is the word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God.

A WORD WITH THE CHILDREN

SONG: ALTOGETHER WHATEVER 475: "Come to the banquet"

1. Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
though you maybe have no money,
though you maybe feel unworthy,
In your strength or in your weakness
you are welcome, come.

2. Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
See, you are an honoured guest,
from constant service you may rest;
so sit you down, be fed and blessed,
for you are welcome, come.

3. Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Woman, wise one, mother, maiden, see your place with food is laden
and your place is set and waiting.
you are welcome, come.

4. Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

Worker, father, little boy,
old man or youth without employ.
come rest your worry, here is joy
and you are welcome, come.

5. Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Whether you've been lost or faithful,
whether you've been wise or wasteful,
here's a place of rest and grace,
and you are welcome, come.

6. Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Here is one who runs to meet you,
loving arms stretched out to greet you.
Do not let your fear defeat you.
You are welcome, come.

7. Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Willing hands have made this bread
with yeast and salt and labour shared.
Let all the hungry ones be fed
It's time for feasting, come.

8. Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.
Abundant wine, enough for all!
Our generous, loving host has called.
The cup of blessing now is poured
for sweet communion, come.

Words and music: Fay White ©Fay White, 37 Goldsmith Street, Maryborough Vic 3465

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 (Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (1976), p.63.)

Hospitable God, you welcome us as people beloved by you and this privilege begs a like response from us. When we welcome you in our lives we are also welcoming all people as people beloved by you.

We confess that there are times when we fail miserably.

We know that for many people this world is indeed an inhospitable place because they are 'estranged from their culture and country, their neighbours, friends and families'

Forgive us when we keep people at arms length and regard them with suspicion if we believe that they are different in any way from us.

We give thanks that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever as is his love for us and he empowers us to relate to one another with that same love - mutual love.

Open the door of our hearts so that we welcome strangers and share what we have, for we know that such things are pleasing to you, O God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and forever and he came into this world to save sinners. We are therefore assured that in Jesus our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

WE LISTEN FOR A WORD FROM GOD

FROM THE EARLY CHRISTIAN LETTERS

Hebrews, Chapter 13. Verses 1 to 8 and 15 to 16

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ... Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

In this scripture is the word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God.

FROM THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

According to St.Luke, Chapter 14. Verses 1 and 7 to 14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

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

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

SERMON

Hospitality and Inclusion

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Meals are important: how many of you have been a stranger at a church somewhere else and someone invited you to their home for a meal?

Today's context

v1 A Sabbath meal at the home of a leading Pharisee (upper class)

Meals were important social events.

The host and his guest were "watching Jesus" closely – implies 'hostile observation'.

They hoped to catch him out. Breaking some social etiquette or custom to give them an excuse to write him off or challenge him.

Meals are important in Luke: Jesus attends Feasts, Banquets, Ritual Feasts, and House parties.

At them everyone watches everyone else to gain social advantage. Jesus watches, comments and gives new directions:

- whether one washes **11:58**
- who eats with whom, when & where **6:4** (Food was used to reject people; kosher)
- what is done or omitted at table **7: 38, 40** (woman and alabaster of oil)(washes feet, kiss)
- who is invited **14: 12-14** (people making excuses, not wanting to reciprocate)
- where people sit **14: 7-11**
- who one eats with **15:2** (eating with sinners)
- what order persons of different rank come to the table **17: 7-8** Starts serving at master's table.

The experiences in our culture are equally important, for example at a family wedding:

- who sits at top table
- who sits with whom
- who can't sit with whom
- where young people sit
- what can we do with children (some no children)
- how many people to invite
- where to draw the line with relatives
- how many friends to invite
- how many work colleagues to invite
- who not to invite

This varies according to culture. I was always embarrassed in the Solomon Islands – we would try to slip in as members of the congregation but were always given seats up the front, often sitting on chairs while everyone else was sitting on the ground.

The companions of Jesus were simple, rough fishermen.

People who touched dead animals generally were not invited to feasts.

Maybe they didn't know how to behave.

Maybe Peter had walked in and indicated that he was going straight to the head of the table.

Maybe Jesus just put him right or gave him good advice.

It was advice similar to that given in the Proverbs 25: 6-7 "Don't try to impress or pretend to be important. It is better to be asked to take a higher position than to be told to give your place to someone more important."

If you were a Rabbi it was suggested that when you go to a dinner party or a meeting – you should always take a position three places below the place you expected to be. Three places too low, and wait for someone to invite you higher. "Don't sit there – come up higher". All this had nothing to do with humility. It had everything to do with social status. It has to do with human politeness, human wisdom and human cunning. Jesus was making sharp insights into human character because if you did take a place too high and someone more important came – and important people almost always come late, to show how important they are or think themselves to be – Then you might

lose your place on the ladder too late to rearrange everything, or you might end up without a seat, having to stand, sit on the floor, or leave in disgrace.

So what was Jesus teaching? He was obviously giving good advice to the early Christians about how to avoid embarrassment. He was also making a brilliant observation of social customs and etiquette of the day.

But today's reading digs deeper. It is not just about the rich and famous but about how to include the poor and the marginalised because in the end of the story Jesus tells us how we should be aware that when inviting people to our function it was important to be inclusive and show genuine hospitality to everyone.

It is not about inviting the rich and famous so you could acquire some kudos for when you were invited in return, but about inviting the people normally excluded. In Leviticus there were laws about including the poor, the crippled, orphans and widows. The best known one was about leaving the gleanings on the edge of the fields so that they could have a source of grain.

In Luke's gospel the Good News is for everybody.

Luke is the reporter who gives us a parable, a story with a deeper meaning, a story with extra meaning.

The question Jesus was answering was not how to behave at table and feasts, but asking the question about how often do we make a special effort to include people in our society, the people who are normally left out. An example of this is inherent in the welcome to country that we use at the beginning of the service and on other occasions, because too often we do forget our indigenous people and their relationship to country.

In my experience the Church has had to ask very serious questions such as:

- How do we include our indigenous people?
- How do we include people living with disabilities? We supply large print hymn books, hearing loop, wheelchair ramps.
- How do we include people who are blind? They usually need a sighted person to inform them what is happening.
- How do we include people who are deaf? We would need an Auslan interpreter.
- How do we include people of different cultures? We allow special cultural congregations.
- How do we include young people? We have special youth clubs and Assemblies.
- How do we include children (at one stage, Synod had a children's synod)
- How do we include GLTBIQ people? We have formed the Uniting Network.
- We take strangers home for a meal.

Finally:

- How do we include these people in the decision-making processes within our church? We have allowed the formation of special language based Conferences to be formed as part of the structural life of the church. In 1990s we formed the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

The story following today's story is the parable of the Great Banquet / God's Banquet. It is a meal, where everyone is invited. We are all gathered around the Lord's table - a symbol of that banquet.

Today's parable tells us that the host is a loving God who wants us to be equally inclusive.

God's dynamic answer is **Everybody to be included** and **God has a special preference for the poor**, broken, hurting and the marginalised. God has a special place for the Poor, Widows and Orphans.

This is the movement which God started in History with the freeing of slaves from Egypt. Isaiah chapter 53 the People of Israel are in captivity in Exile. A time when they had lost their King, country, and temple and then discovered that God was with them in their suffering. When the people returned from exile many Foreigners and Eunuchs came back with them. They were no longer to be banned from the worshipping community (Deuteronomy 23) but would be remembered by having their names written on the walls of the temple Isaiah 56:6. That same inclusion of Eunuchs was replicated in the Book of Acts with the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Philip (Acts 8:26f). That same message is part of the ministry of Jesus where he is to be known as Emmanuel which means God is with us. Jesus welcomes women, Syro-Phoenicians, Samaritans, Roman Soldiers and others.

Methodism grew at a time when the people in Britain were moving into the cities during the Industrial revolution. The Anglican Church stayed in the rural countryside and so the Methodist Church was born. In the late 1860s as people looked to develop community centres the Settlement Movement started in the industrial cities of London, Manchester, Liverpool etc. More recently the Uniting Church has encouraged the development of multicultural worshipping communities as a way to enable people whose second language is English to worship in their own cultural tradition.

Christ continues to call us to be inclusive of all people.

We gather these thoughts in the hymn "When Jesus healed on Sabbath days."

HYMN: "When Jesus healed on Sabbath days" Tune Tis 299

1. When Jesus healed on Sabbath days
He broke the sacred law;
The power structures were appalled;
Were shocked by what they saw.
2. For breaking of the Sabbath rules
Was such a heinous crime;
But Jesus taught that giving care
Was right at any time.
3. Laws cannot bind the gen'rous soul
Nor halt love's strong embrace;
We cannot regulate good deeds
nor govern gifts of grace.
4. The time to give support and care
Is now and every day;
When love was needed, it was there;
This was the Jesus Way.
5. To fail to see the work of God
In acts of gen'rous care
Shows blindness and a hardened heart;
Of this we should beware!

6. When love is given and received
God is revealed each time;
When love is given and received
It renders life sublime.

SHARING OUR COMMUNITY LIFE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

OFFERING and OFFERTORY PRAYER

SONG: Jesus Took Bread

1. Jesus Took Bread, ordinary bread
Made by the hands of women and men.
Jesus took bread, broke it and said:
'My body is this bread
Eat it and be fed.'

2. Jesus took wine, ordinary wine
Made by the hands of women and men.
'My blood is in this cup
Drink it and be cleansed.'

Bread from the grain
Ground in the mill
We eat it now
And know we are filled.
Wine from the grape
Picked in the sun
We drink it now
New life has come.

3. Jesus our bread, broken on the tree
Killed by the hands of women and men.
Jesus, your blood shed to set us free
Yes, Lord, we believe
this love we can see.

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 — 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 sing:

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 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.)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

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.

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

HYMN TIS 545: "Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast"

1

Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast;
Heaven's own fare has fed the last and least;
Christ's own peace is shared again on earth;
God the Spirit fills us with new worth.

2

No more doubting, no more senseless dread:
God's good self has graced our wine and bread;
all the wonder heaven has kept in store.
now is ours to keep for evermore.

3

Celebrate with saints who dine on high,
witnesses that love can never die.
'Hallelujah!' - thus their voices ring:
nothing less in gratitude we bring.

4

Praise the Maker, praise the Maker's Son,
praise the Spirit - three yet ever one;
praise the God whose food and friends avow
heaven starts here! The kingdom beckons now!

BENEDICTION

Go into this week

nourished by the refreshing love of God
filled with the humble love of Jesus Christ
empowered by the active love of the Holy Spirit.

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.

Please join us for refreshments in upper hall.

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