

Order of Worship

St.Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

8th September 2019 – Rev Dr Robert Stringer

Pentecost 13C

THEME: **The cost of discipleship**

INTROIT: **TIS 787** “Longing for light” Verse 1 and chorus

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

*Christ be our light!
Shine in our hearts, Shine through our darkness.
Christ is our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

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 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: Psalm 139 based on verses 1-6

O God, you know us inside and out, through and through.

You search us out and lay your hand upon us.

You know what we are going to say even before we speak.

We praise you, O God, for the wonderful knowledge that whoever we are and wherever we go, you are with us.

HYMN TIS 786: “Word of God, come down on earth”

1 Word of God, come down on earth,
living rain from heav'n descending;
touch our hearts and bring to birth
faith and hope and love unending.
Word almighty, we revere you;
Word made flesh, we long to hear you.

2 Word eternal, throned on high,
Word that brought to life creation.
Word that came from heav'n to die,
crucified for our salvation.
Saving Word, the world restoring,
speak to us, your love outpouring.

3 Word that caused blind eyes to see,
speak and heal our mortal blindness.
Deaf we are, our healer be,
loose our tongues to tell your kindness.
Be our Word in pity spoken;
heal the world, by our sin broken.

4 Word that speaks your father's love,
one with God beyond all telling.
Word that sends us from above,
God the Spirit, with us dwelling.
Word of truth, to all truth lead us;
Word of life, with one bread feed us.

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OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, we sometimes think of Jesus as a cornerstone of life because that suggests something important and solid for our lives. Through that metaphor Jesus links us with you and with one another and with his risen life and power. We come praising you today for Jesus' gifts of sacrificial love, a gift which inspire us to reach out to others with a similar love. As people so lovingly brought together, O God, so fill us with the desire to break down barriers that exist between people and you. As you welcome us, who once were strangers, as friends, may we (continue to) make this your church a hospitable place where strangers can become friends. May we always give thanks for the great gift of faith in you, O God. As you reached out to us in Christ, and transformed our lives, so may that transformation be visible through the way we share our faith and welcome strangers into this, your dwelling place. **Amen**

WORD WITH THE CHILDREN

HYMN TIS 666: "We are marching in the light of God"

1
We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God

*We are marching, marching,
we are marching, Oh, Oh
we are marching in the light of the Light of God.
We are marching, marching,
we are marching, Oh, Oh
we are marching in the light of the Light of God.*

2

We are living in the Light of God.
We are living in the Light of God.
We are living in the Light of God.
We are living in the Light of God.

3

We are living in the love of God.
We are living in the love of God.
We are living in the love of God.
We are living in the love of God.

4

We are moving in the power of God
We are moving in the power of God
We are moving in the power of God
We are moving in the power of God

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

Lord Jesus Christ, we know in our hearts that discipleship demands an utterly new way of seeing people as you did, and being with them unconditionally, as you were, but the journey from heart to eyes and hands and feet can be long and difficult. We confess that we find it especially difficult to remember that loving you takes priority over everything and everyone else in our lives - even family and friends. Remind us that when we do love you like this, our relationships are shaped by this love also and can become deeper and stronger.

Forgive our reluctance to proclaim with our lips and our lives that you are Lord of our lives.

We confess that we prefer our journeys of faith to be devout, but not too daring; comfortable and not too threatening.

Forgive our fear of treading your way of obedience - the way of the cross.

***SONG:** Sung while seated as a continuation of the prayer:*

ALL TOGETHER OK 394: "Search me, O God" *This is a beautiful hymn based on Psalm 139 with the music based on Beethoven's La Pathetique*

Search me, O God
and know my anxious heart,
behind me and before me
You lay Your hand upon me.

Where might I hide
to flee Your tender touch?
No darkness or the ocean
hides me from Your devotion.

*You know my every need,
You know my thoughts, my joy, my crying.
God Your wisdom ways
surround me at my birth,
my dying.*

Woven by You
deep in my mother's womb.
That moment of conception
You knew my life's direction

Search me, O God
and purify my ways.
O teach me love surpassing,
guide me in all that's lasting.

*You know my every need,
You know my thoughts, my joy, my crying.
God Your wisdom ways
surround me at my birth,
my dying.*

Search me, O God
and know my anxious heart,
behind me and before me
You lay Your hand upon me.

Lord Jesus Christ, give us the grace to trust in the unknowing nature of your call to each of us and the unknown direction which you call us to travel. You have travelled the road already so what have we to fear?

Jesus, Saviour and Lord, we do want to be your followers so that we can reveal through our lives, as you did, the shape of God's unconditional love.

May we be filled, renewed, and guided by the Holy Spirit so that we commit ourselves anew to the challenge of following Jesus Christ - serving and loving others in his name and for his sake. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (*1 Timothy 1: 15*) - so rejoice - for in him, we are forgiven, we are healed, we are renewed.

Thanks be to God!

WE LISTEN FOR A WORD FROM GOD

FROM THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

The Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 18. Verses 1 to 11

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and

break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

FROM THE EARLY CHRISTIAN LETTERS

Philemon, Verses 1 to 21

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother - To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the Church in your house:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love - and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful[f] both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother - especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

FROM THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

According to St. Luke, Chapter 14. Verses 25 to 33

Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus; and he turned and said to them, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

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

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

REFLECTION

The Cost of Discipleship

Luke 14:25-33

The situation last week Parable of the Feast 14: 7-14
Jesus is embarrassing the Pharisees, saying clearly that;
the poor
the crippled
the lame
the blind are all welcome in the Kingdom of God.

They are the ones to be invited to the feast.

They are the members of the Kingdom of God – a place where people felt safe, saved, redeemed, honoured, divine, sometimes called the Family of God.

Verse 26 Now an even larger crowd of these people are following Jesus. Jesus is popular. Jesus is teaching them. Calling them to be disciples. In fact Jesus sets out to shock them.

Jesus talks about discipline, self-initiative and survival

NRSV reads “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes even life itself, cannot (is not able to) be my disciple.”

Verse 27 Jesus talks about risk and suffering.

“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot (is not able to) be my disciple.”

Verse 33 Sacrifice vs desire

“So therefore none of you can become (are able to become) my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions.”

To illustrate the point Jesus gives us two parables about what it means to count the cost:

1. The building a tower and
2. The waging of war

How are we to respond?

This all seems a bit much, seems too hard.

When people hang around and are attracted to the Gospel or Church, when they express an interest,

Jesus asks – Are you interested? **Count the cost**

Are you excited? **Count the cost**

Are you ready to follow? **Count the cost**

Jesus is calling for a commitment to radical discipleship.

It is what Bonhoeffer called Radical Discipleship and he wrote a book called “The cost of discipleship.” In it Bonhoeffer contrasted cheap grace (the easy invitation and welcome to the banquet) compared to costly grace (the cost to live the gospel), the discipline, the suffering, the sacrifice, and the radical actions. It was something that you don’t do on your own. We are called to become radical communities.

Jesus is challenging us.

Don’t be like those who start a building, lay a foundation, but never finish it. Constructing alternative radical communities sounds great, but where are the results? show us? We need to see it in action—can you stay the distance, change with the times?

Churches can be a memorial to movements that didn’t always count the cost.

Jesus points out that those who make war are soldiers who accept discipline and sacrifice and are ready to suffer, the cost does not take them by surprise – but what about those who make peace, those who seek justice. Those who seek to live a life like Jesus. Are we ready to do the same? Are we prepared? Will we be surprised by the cost and give up? Are we prepared to love our enemies?

If we are, then we had better mark who are our adversaries – the rulers, the government, the powerful, the war-making institutions, the oppressive systems, the large corporations that buy from and sell to us, and create markets. Those who make peace have to negotiate a compromise before we get routed in the battle.

This is what Jesus means by counting the cost.

So let's look at the hard sayings and what it means to count the cost.

Let us start with **verse 33** possessions.

Are there things that possess us?

If things possess us we are not free.

Jesus is saying 'so therefore whoever of you who does not renounce all that you have, cannot be my disciple.'

Anything we cannot give up will certainly get in the way, hold us back, slow us down, be a heavy burden and be used against us.

It is a fundamental principle of the gospel.

Freedom is not a licence to accumulate. It is rather about how much we can use for good, how much we can save and how much give away. (John Wesley)

We must not be slaves to wealth and security.

Jesus is asking us whether we are free enough to follow him.

It's about sacrifice vs desire.

Verse 27

"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow after me cannot be my disciple."

The language of cross-bearing has been corrupted.

Bearing a cross has nothing to do with chronic illness or suffering a painful physical condition, or suffering from physical and spiritual abuse.

Instead it is the voluntary choosing to follow Jesus.

Cross-bearing requires a deliberate choice to sacrifice and embrace the risk, the ridicule, and worse in order to follow Jesus. This commitment is not just a way of life – it is a commitment to a person, to be a disciple and living a new way of life.

Some examples – Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King.

Choosing suffering – beyond fear – Rev Neville Watson as a peace activist deliberately went and camped in the area between the armies of the Americans and Iraqis during the Iraq war.

Verse 26

What did Jesus mean when he said: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes even life itself unless you do this you cannot be my disciples"?

What does Jesus mean by **hate** in this context?

Hate in this context is a Semitic expression meaning "to turn away from, to detach oneself from" rather than our animosity-laden understanding.

This is about discipleship and individual commitment to Christ.

In middle eastern society, and many other societies the family is everything.

Family is the source of emotional security

the source of loans

the source of wealth (inheritance)

the source of social security

the source of labour

the source of religious belief

the source of identity

the source of honour and pride

Today the nuclear family is not quite the same.

But according to family systems theory today's family can be:

the source of identity, not always the real self, eg somebody's mother or father.

the source of dishonour

the source of breakdown of values

the source of psychological damage

We read in Acts about the Jailer at Philippi

He and whole household were so impressed with Paul and Silas and their behaviour in prison that they asked to be baptised.

Similar events happened on missions in the South Pacific and other places.

According to Jesus – Jews become believers not because they have ancestors, but when each generation makes their own commitment.

No such thing as a second-generation Christian, each generation has to make their own choice.

Jesus talked about “who is my mother and father?” – they are those who hear the Word of God and put it into action. Luke 8:21 The Church becomes the new family – Kingdom of God.

We have a lot to do to regain our place in our community.

1. The community's perception of the Church

Very recent research amongst Aussies tells us several confronting things:

- A problem when the term “Christian” or “Church” is used (many are turned off by institutionalized religion.)
- 98-97% of Aussie kids do not enter a Church building on any regular basis - what does that say about what the Church will look like in 10-20 years time?

2. The fragmentation of communities and families

In today's fast-paced world, where technology advances at an alarming rate, knowledge grows in leaps and bounds, but human relationships fail and falter, we are becoming more isolated, fearful and losing our sense of connectedness to family and community.

What does this mean for the Church and community?

It means we must be community focused!

Community-focused congregations seek to be salt and light in their communities, showing the good news of Jesus Christ through good deeds and good will.

There are many opportunities within our community life for Christians to bring salt and light – through organisations we belong to, people we meet, outreach activities, CRE in schools etc.

For example, what do the children in Australia need? Let's look at some facts.

- In 2002, the **Victorian Principals Association** made a submission to the Government claiming that 30% of teaching time is taken up by dealing with the welfare needs of children.
- **Department of Education (VIC) acknowledges the value of mentoring as a support to disadvantaged children**
- **At least 500,000 children are estimated to live in poverty**
- **23,000 children take one particular brand of anti-depressant**
- **Around 680,000 children are growing up in jobless households. They risk handing disadvantage on to their own children.**
- **According to a report by the Brotherhood of St Lawrence¹, children from disadvantaged families have a higher chance of not coping in early years of school, low academic achievement, developing physical/mental health problems, leaving school early, engaging in risk taking behaviours, and serving a jail sentence.**
- In several states in the USA, predictions about future requirements for prison accommodation are made on the basis of Grade 3 reading levels, Australia has similar statistics.
- **In a survey conducted recently, 14% of children could not identify ONE significant adult who spends one-to-one time with them.**

In response to these figures, the Uniting Church in Banyule has implemented a child mentoring program in local primary schools.

The challenge is to act at all times for the greater service of others.

Such a commitment requires inner searching, social analysis and a commitment to serve others in the community in which we live. I think we in the Uniting Church are very good at doing this.

The love of God, the love of people, transforms the self beyond being an individual towards the purposes of God, becoming part of the Family of God, which is there to serve the community.

We gather this up in the words of the great hymn -

TIS 650: “Brother, sister, let me serve you”

1

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

2

We are pilgrims on a journey
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

3

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

4

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

5

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

6

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven,
hallowed be Your Name;
Your Kingdom come;
Your will be done on earth as in Heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins 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 for ever. Amen.

OFFERING and OFFERTORY PRAYER CHILDREN REPORT ON ACTIVITY

HYMN TIS 658: "I the Lord of sea and sky!"

1

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord;
is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

2

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

3

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame;
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

BENEDICTION

Go into this week rejoicing
that your life is blessed by God's creative love
that your heart is filled with Jesus' discerning love
that your mind is inspired by the Holy Spirit's empowering love.

ASCRPTION

TIS 782 "Go now in peace"

Go now in peace, go now in peace,
may the love of God surround you
everywhere, everywhere you may go.

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