**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE – Epiphany 4b**

**29th – 31st January 2021**

You may like to follow our service on our video. You can find it on our Worship Services page on our website at <https://www.macedonrangesunitingchurch.org.au/worship-services> or on YouTube at [https://youtu.be/JVirxRKTkVA](https://youtu.be/JVirxRKTkVA%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

 Our service invites you to read the scriptures, pause, meditate and pray. Allow the stories told to lead you. We suggest reading the passages when suggested below. We are touching on several of the scripture readings in one way or another this week.

If you would like to look at previous videos on our YouTube channel, go to <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCb4hzdO-YgzmrIRVC-oby_w>.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

We acknowledge all the Aboriginal Groups who have cared for and nurtured the land on which we meet: the Wurundjeri; Woi Wurruung; Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung.

We acknowledge their leaders: past, present and emerging for it is in them that Australia’s future lies.

You are welcome here, as we reflect in different rooms and districts, States and Countries around the world, our spiritual connectedness through Christ Jesus, is remembered.

**WELCOME and CALL TO WORSHIP**

Welcome to our worship today. It is shorter than usual, for a variety of reasons. I still hope it brings you into an experience of God, a way of thinking about the connection between God’s story and yours, and a time of true worship.

There’s been a lesson or two for me in this week about letting go, about doing what’s possible instead of what’s perfect, about being vulnerable enough to say “I just can’t do what I’d like to do for you” and about accepting my own limitations. I wonder what lessons you bring to this time of worship? I wonder whether you’re feeling frail or feisty, lost or loving, moody or marvellous…you could be feeling all of them and more!

*I invite you to take a deep breath…in and out*

Let’s acknowledge that we bring all that we are, all that we feel, all that we have done, or haven’t, all that we worry about. We don’t need to lay them aside, because the God who calls us is interested in the whole of us, and longs for us to join in writing the story of life that God is authoring.

*Let’s take another breath...in and out*

But we do need to hold them gently, and ask them to just be silent for a moment, so that we can hear the voice of God, sometimes still and small, sometimes joyous and gigantic. We need them to stop clamouring and grasping at us, to allow ourselves to remember that we are always in the presence of the Holy Three in One.

*And a final breath…in and out*

Come as you are. Come from wherever you are. Come whenever you can. You are welcome.

**SONG: Psalm 111** by Richard Bruxvoort Colligan

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS** Rev Linda Young

Forgive us oh Lord

Forgive us when we have no words to say or say too much

Forgive us when we have no energy or use our energy at the determent of others

Forgive us when all there is left is to sit and cry and wonder and mourn

Forgive us when we forget to call out to you and try to do it alone.

Forgive us when we see others’ pain and turn away.

Forgive us we pray

Thank you for your loving kindness which surpasses our understanding

Thank you for your unfailing love

Thank you for your eternal presence

Thank you that you take our failings and our misadventures and bring forgiveness and healing.

We thank you for your promise, that indeed our sins are forgiven.

In Christ we pray.

Amen

**BIBLE READINGS:** Mark 1:21-28.

You may like to read today’s other readings: Ps 111, Deuteronomy 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians,

**REFLECTION** *by Ps Annette Buckley*

As I read the gospel this week I wondered: what kind of authority did people recognise in Jesus, and what it was about it that was so threatening to the unclean spirit in the synagogue? We might like to think that Jesus was clearly and obviously the Son of God to all who encountered him, but the gospels do not give that impression. In the story from Mark, the synagogue members had already recognised something different about Jesus’ teaching, even before the encounter with the man with the unclean spirit. It reminded me of the reaction to the young poet, Amanda Gorman, who recited her poem ‘The hill we climb’ at the inauguration of President Biden in the United States. Something about this young woman’s bearing and the power of her words captivated people. I haven’t necessarily heard the word ‘authority’ used about her, but her inspiring words and her confidence, creativity and insight have been recognised and celebrated.

It turns out that Amanda Gorman has had a speech impediment and auditory processing issues. It might be a reasonable addition to her story to describe how she has overcome these adversities. But that is not the story that she tells. She describes how her inability to speak clearly lead her to writing, specifically poetry, in order that her voice might be ‘heard’. What others might see as a disability she describes as a step towards her becoming the poet that she is. Amanda Gorman is the author (the word shares its roots with the word “authority”) of her own story. In living in such a way she is able to give voice to her observations in ways that inspire others.

In a similar way, Jesus was not about to let the man with the unclean spirit tell the story of who he was. In noticing that the man correctly identifies Jesus as “the Holy One of God” we miss the way that he dismisses Jesus (of Nazareth, that backwater!) and tries to label him or pre-empt what his mission might be. He is trying to be the author of Jesus’ destiny at this point by claiming the power to name him and describe his intent. Jesus is having none of it, and deals with the man and his unclean spirit on the spot.

It led me to think about how we can be held captive by the way others try to write our stories. There are the voices from our childhood that tell us we’re not clever enough, or too lazy, or too outspoken, or not strong enough. There are voices from our culture that tell us we’re not pretty enough, or that others are more important, or that we “should” do and be so many things that we don’t and aren’t. We can feel like failures for not living up to the expectations of other individuals or our society as a whole, or we can exhaust ourselves trying to bend our square shapes into decidedly round holes. These are certainly some of the unclean spirits that plague us.

It is not the way of Jesus. Jesus is always absolutely and utterley himself. This, I think is the authority others recognised: the strength of a person who is totally human in a way that is completely aligned to the divine story. This is the Spirit Jesus offers and the call he issues to us all. If we all took hold of that challenge together, there would be no unclean spirits that would dare to face us.

Some people ask in some situations “What would Jesus do?” A better question might be “What would I do….if I were able to act completely out of who I am as part of the divine story, just as Jesus did?” You are a child of God, with strengths, gifts, vulnerabilities and experiences that are uniquely yours. Will you allow others to write your story for you this week? What will authority look like for you?

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS** (Leaning in: a song by Christopher Grundy)

We pray for the lonely ones

knowing that some of us are lonely

and we pray for the heartbroken ones

knowing that some of us are heartbroken

**All our hearts and minds**

**are leaning in with clear intention**

**joining in your way**

**of love in the world**

We pray for the wounded ones

knowing that some of us are wounded

and we pray for the regretful ones

knowing that some of us are regretful

**All our hearts and minds**

**are leaning in with clear intention**

**joining in your way**

**of healing in the world**

We pray for the starving ones

knowing that some of us are starving

and we pray for the imprisoned ones

knowing that some of us are imprisoned

**All our hearts and minds**

**are leaning in with clear intention**

**joining in your way**

**of justice in the world**

We pray for the dying ones

knowing that some of us are dying

and we pray for the newly born ones

knowing that some of us are arriving

**All our hearts and minds**

**are leaning in with clear intention**

**joining in your way**

**of love in the world. Amen**

**Sending out and blessing:** Where Jesus was by The Many

Where wise ones follow a star,

and angels sing new songs

Where, out in the cold of night,

impossible was born…

that’s where Jesus was

*Wherever love was*

*that’s where Jesus was*

*that’s where Jesus was*

*Wherever hope was*

*that’s where Jesus was*

*that’s where Jesus was too*

*Whatever love would do*

*that’s what Jesus did*

*and the miracle is*

*that’s still where Jesus is*

When eyes could finally see

When the hungry child was fed

When prisoners were freed

and kind words freely said

that’s where Jesus was

Where the sick were finally will

Loaves and fish were simply shared

when the truth was truly spoken

forgiveness really there

that’s where Jesus was

How can we live like Jesus lived

How can we do what Jesus did?

How can we be where Jesus is?

We go step by step, step by step

We go step by step, step by step

and we follow.

**OFFERING**

You may like to consider giving an offering to your congregation via direct deposit. Details for each are:

* Gisborne: Gisborne branch, Bendigo bank, B.S.B. 633 108, A/C: 1512 83736
* Romsey: Bendigo Bank, B.S.B. 633 000, A/C: 161501200, Account name: UCA Romsey Uniting Church
* Lancefield: Account Name: Lancefield Uniting Church, BSB: 633 108, A/C No: 112926639
* Mia Mia – Kyneton: Commonwealth bank, B.S.B. 063 517, Account no.: 1002 1775

 *I will publish other congregation’s details as they come to hand. Contact you congregation’s treasurer for details if they are not here.*