**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE – Easter 4B**

**23rd – 25th April 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/r9ZotpqrG0s>

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. This week we are following “7 days of Solidarity “, a Uniting Church in Australia initiative to support nations that COVID-19 has impacted in a detrimental way.

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.

**SONG: GATHER US IN**

**alternative: TiS 137 For the Beauty of the Earth**

**INTRODUCTION TO *7 DAYS OF SOLIDARITY***

**OPENING PRAYER**

We have so much to be thankful for despite the challenges we have faced over the past year not only as individuals but also within our families, society and in the world.

Today we are reminded of the work that God is doing through our partner churches, as they continue to live out their calling to go out and tell the world of the Good News that has come to us through Jesus Christ.

**HYMN TiS 217: LOVE DIVINE, ALL LOVES EXCELLING**

**BIBLE READINGS:** Acts 4:5-12, **1 John 3:16-24b**, Psalm 23, John 10:11-18

**REFLECTION** by Janet Wood

We are all tired of saying and hearing that this has been a strange and disconnecting time for our local communities in their various states of lockdown, our nation with state borders closed and with the world as airlines came to a halt. Now we emerge relatively unscathed here in Australia. We look out on a world where life and health are grim and daily bread is in short supply.

For us, in the Macedon Ranges, there has been energy and angst as we work through what it means for congregations to be in partnership with each other. Perhaps we’ll recognise ourselves in some of the stories from the Book of Acts set for reading for the next weeks. This is our story too. It’s one of charismatic leaders, braving rough treatment from the authorities. It s one of small groups still unsure of what to believe and who should be allowed to join them. It’s also a story of partnerships, between communities in different places, the sharing of goods and sharing of gifts. That also makes it our story.

The Uniting Church does not only have partnerships between its own people and their congregations. It has partnerships with other denominations and with cousin churches overseas. UnitingWorld is the justice and aid arm of our overseas partnership. It says “Together we work for a world where lives are whole and hopeful, free from poverty and injustice.”

COVID-19 has shown us just how fragile lives can be, not only in terms of illness and deaths but also in the drastic loss of income for those who truly need to work each day to have anything like daily bread and shelter. Hence Uniting World has asked us to commit to hearing seven powerful stories of our partners in the Solomon Islands, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu, India, Timor-Leste and South Sudan----one for each day. Each day we have a glimpse of what God is doing through the eyes of a local Christian.

Here in Australia we often lament the hostile soil of evangelism. While of course we are not thereby deterred from or excused from trying to help our people see that faith matters, but we can take heart from knowing that evangelism doesn’t stop at national boundaries.

Paul and his assistants collected funds to support Christian believers in Jerusalem to strengthen them for the cause of evangelism. And we are an active part in this spreading of the news of peace and justice in Christ when we commit to living in solidarity with those who do call out to us to fulfil the promise we make when we join in partnership with them.

You might as well have links with any one of the countries from where these 7 stories come.

Perhaps, because it’s so close to Anzac Day we could focus on the hopes and needs of the people of Timor-Leste .

**REFLECTION FROM *7 DAYS OF SOLIDARITY***

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

God of infinite compassion, from age to age we tell the stories of Jesus’ time on earth -comforting the suffering, healing the sick, speaking out against injustice, challenging the powerful, and bringing hope to all humanity. Though those feet no longer walk the earth, and those hands no longer rest on the afflicted, we know you still hear the calling of your people and we bring our prayers for the world in this time.

We pray for those struggling for the essentials of life –for food, clothing and shelter, but also for healthcare, and education - we pray that every bowl and every belly might be filled, and that every child might have the hope that comes from learning and dreaming.

We pray for everyone who is oppressed or exploited in this time, and for victims of violence and trauma, that their wounds might be healed with peace, grace and justice.

We pray for the burgeoning effects of climate change, praying that all of humankind might have the moral fortitude to stand in solidarity to address this threat, and knowing that we all breathe the same air, we pray especially for those whose lives have been upset or ended during this time of pandemic, just as we pray for victims of other natural disasters like floods, cyclones and earthquakes.

Beyond all of this, we pray for ourselves, in this here-and-now:

We pray for the courage to remain engaged with the messy, broken, beautiful world around us.

We pray for the integrity not to conveniently throw up our hands in despair when hope is hard to find -help us to have the constancy and the faith to continue looking for the cracks where your light shines through, knowing beyond doubt that your light is never lost.

We pray for the vision to get on board with the life-changing work that you are doing through our Christian sisters and brothers, whether that be down the street or on the other side of the world.

We pray that you will move hands and hearts, throughout this land and every land, to answer the human needs that go wanting.

And we pray that we, your people, might shine as an example of compassion and generosity in the way we use our words, our actions, our time, our talents and our resources.

Loving God, knowing you hear us and support us beyond our own strength, we lay down all that is heavy on our hearts at this time. And we take up, instead, the challenge to be your hands and feet and voice and eyes to our neighbours -next door, and in every place.

In Jesus’ name we pray. AMEN

**SONG: THE LORD HEARS THE CRIES OF THE POOR**

**alternative: TiS 624 Christ be my leader by night as by day**

**SENDING OUT AND BLESSING:**

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, superficial relationships,

so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation,

so that you will work for justice, equity and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection starvation and war,

so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them, and change their pain to joy.

and may God bless you with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world,

so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.

**AMEN**

**REFLECTION: COME, GREAT SPIRIT (theworkofthepeople.com)**

**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
* Mia Mia – Kyneton: Commonwealth bank, B.S.B. 063 517, Account no.: 1002 1775