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

**12th – 14th March 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/6rVec0FbXRY](https://youtu.be/6rVec0FbXRY" \t "_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**

Welcome to this fourth Sunday in Lent. We come together from all different locations, we are watching at different times, in different places, but the Spirit is with us, wherever we are. As we come to worship our God, to contemplate what it means to be thinking about light and dark, on this journey of Lent, towards the cross. We take time to be grateful for all we have, the beautiful area we find ourselves in and for the freedoms to be able to come and worship together.

**CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 – The Message**

1-3Oh, thank God—he’s so good!  
    His love never runs out.  
All of you set free by God, tell the world!  
    Tell how he freed you from oppression,  
Then rounded you up from all over the place,  
    from the four winds, from the seven seas.

17-22Some of you were sick because you’d lived a bad life,  
    your bodies feeling the effects of your sin;  
You couldn’t stand the sight of food,  
    so miserable you thought you’d be better off dead.  
Then you called out to God in your desperate condition;  
    he got you out in the nick of time.  
He spoke the word that healed you,  
    that pulled you back from the brink of death.  
So thank God for his marvelous love,  
    for his miracle mercy to the children he loves;  
Offer thanksgiving sacrifices,  
    tell the world what he’s done—sing it out!

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION & THANKSGIVING**

Loving God, you bring light out of darkness,

But you offer us darkness as a place to contemplate, to be still, to be nourished, to be fed,

So that when light is revealed we may flourish.

We remember that light is not just a place of beauty and revelation, it is also a place of revealing those dark places in us.

Loving God, forgive us when we have allowed those dark places to overcome us.

Forgive us when we stay to, to, long in those dark places.

Loving God, we have all had experiences that have been hard and difficult and, in those times, when we would want to curl up in a ball, we thank you that your loving arms are around us. We thank you that you love us and care for us through all the phases of our lives; the ups and downs, are lights and darks.

Loving God, as we continue to walk on this Lenten path, may our eyes be fixed on the cross, in that we see the darkness in humanity and what we can do to each other, but even in that darkness light comes through life and resurrection to new beginnings, greater than we could even possibly imagined.

We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the light and the shade of life and we ask this in his name. Amen

**SONG:** *Sanctuary* byCarrie Newcomer

Alternative suggestion: TiS 569 Guide me, O thou great redeemer

**BIBLE READINGS:** Numbers 21:4-9, Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22, Ephesians 2:1-10, John 3:14-21

**REFLECTION** By Ps Annette Buckley

“There are things waiting in the darkness. Creatures of metal, fire, and blood.” (from Dr. Who) What do you think of when you think of ‘darkness’? Fear…the unknown…secrets…bad things happening…? In many myths and legends the night and its creatures are to be feared, as well as the dark woods and whatever lies in ‘the shadows’.

In our gospel story this week, Nicodemus has used the cover of darkness to make his way to Jesus. He’s obviously keen to hear what Jesus has to say, but doesn’t come for a conversation during the daylight hours. Perhaps it’s not surprising that a Jewish leader (Nicodemus is a Pharisee, and a member of the Sanhedrin) wouldn’t want to be seen seeking Jesus out so soon after Jesus has made a scene at the temple. It’s interesting that from Nicodemus’ visit to Jesus in the dark, some of the best-known verses in the bible have sprung.

John 3:16…perhaps because of the usual translation: “For God **so** loved the world….” we think that Jesus is talking about the *depth* of God’s love. In fact, it more about *the manner* in which God loves the world. It’s about God’s holding nothing back, God’s total commitment to the beloved, God’s continual desire to bring humanity – each and every one of us – into relationship with God’s self. This love is not a warm and fuzzy sentimentality, but a bold and visceral action beyond anything we can understand.

With today’s eyes, and our familiarity with the Cross as a sign of our faith, it is hard to conceive of how scandalous the Cross was to the people of Jesus’ time. The idea that God’s messiah might not only go to his death via this means of torture and oppression, but that it might somehow become a sign of healing and grace, would have been nonsensical and offensive. John’s gospel, however, describes this darkest of events as the ultimate expression of God’s love for the world.

The is the faith we are called to re-enter during our Lenten journey. What have you learned, or what might you learn from a time of darkness in your own life? What helps you to ‘look up’, away from your fears and whatever is death-dealing in your life, to find healing, hope and life without limits? How prepared are we to follow in the footsteps of the One who gives everything for the sake of a needy world?

**TEAM REFLECTION**

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: a paraphrase of The Lord’s Prayer**by Jim cotter, adapted for *A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*

Eternal Spirit,

Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:  
  
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom

sustain our hope and come on earth.  
  
With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and testing, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and for ever. Amen.

**READING FROM *Curly Pyjama Letters***

*by Michael Leunig*

**SONG: The Fruitful Darkness**

Alternative suggestion: TiS 351 Lift high the Cross

**SENDING OUT AND BLESSING:**

May the wonder of God’s vastness be with you.

The delight of the evening sky and the multitude of stars.

Those little lights that shine and bless us and

the morning sun that comes and rises every day.

With great faithfulness.

With all these things we give thanks to God. Have a wonderful week. God bless you

**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