**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE – Proper 17B**

**27th-29th August 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

 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 First Nations people who have cared for and nurtured the land on which we meet: the Wurundjeri; Woi Wurruung; Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung.

We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging

We commit ourselves to the work of justice and reconciliation with all people, and with God

**WELCOME and CALL TO WORSHIP**

Welcome to our time of worship, for what would have been for us a time of gathering all our Partnership congregations together. Instead, we gather together, apart, in our homes. We gather in difficult times, in the midst of uncertainty, with concerns for people known and close to us, and people unknown and far away. We come wondering what the news might bring in the coming days, and hoping for signs of new life in the midst of the death and despair we have seen in the last week.

Wherever you are, whenever you join us, you are welcome, you are called, to come and worship the God who stands beside us and shares our concerns and who meets our fears with the assurance that love is greater than our fear. We gather to worship the God who offers new life and new hope in the darkest moments.

Come, and worship the God revealed in the story of Creation, in the story of the scriptures, in the story of your very own life

**SONG: Be thou my vision (TiS 547)**

**OPENING PRAYER**

As we gather we pray

that we might meet today

the God of glory,

whose presence is found

in mighty spreading trees

and the tiniest of buds of new life

Whose presence is seen

in a riot of creative colour

and the clear, still waters

Who longs to provide us

with work for our hands

and rest for our souls

with food for the journey

for body and soul

Who has blessed the earth

with creatures who are our companions

and those who are wild and free

Who guides us through

the tangled pathways of life

and skips beside us

on the gentle paths

Who rewards our work

with bountiful harvests

and beauty and delight

From sunrise to sunset, you are God

And we come to worship and praise you.

Amen.

As we gather, we are aware that

we can miss the opportunities

that come our way

to appreciate God’s goodness

and share it with those around us.

God sees what is within us

and hears our desire

to make a new start,

to live out the blessings

of a heart aligned with God

And so, we can be sure

that our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**BIBLE READINGS:** Song of Songs 2:8-13, Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9, **James 1:17-27, Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

**REFLECTION** By Ps Annette Buckley

How can we be acceptable to worship God?

The religious leaders from Jerusalem in today’s reading from Mark’s gospel were trying to answer this question. To help, they had a list, checkboxes to be ticked off, and they were obviously looking out for the ‘right’ behaviour from others. Despite Jesus’ rebuke of them, the Church has continued to follow in their footsteps. We might not even notice, but we are also more than capable of doing that. We can have our own internal checklists about what makes a ‘real’ Christian, and we can set up barriers to people when they fail to tick all the boxes.

Jesus goes on to talk about what comes from inside, with a list of attitudes and attributes that are personal. The gospel records, in a section not included in the lectionary reading, that during this conversation, Jesus ‘declared all foods clean’. Abstaining from certain foods in order to be acceptable to God is declared null and void. Instead, the things that get in the way of a relationship with God come from within.

The writer of James, however, is concerned with what is on the outside, our behaviour, how the live out our faith. Having good attitudes and attributes is fine but it is not the end of the story. What we do and what we believe or think should be integrated, a word which has the same root as *integrity.* To have integrity before God, with ourselves and with our communities, we need to live out of the values we say we believe in.

God’s hope is that the actions that flow out of a life of faith don’t come from fear of being punished, or out of a sense of duty, or blind obedience, or an attempt to simply be ‘good’. God’s love for us is like the love expressed by the lovers in the Song of Songs; passionate, intimate and mutual. God’s hope is that we will hear God’s song of love…for us, for others, for the world around us…and respond in kind.

“…every perfect gift is from above…” says the writer of James. We are made acceptable to God through the love God has shown us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God’s Church is called to be the community that lives out that love in the world. I wonder if we have any rules, stated or unspoken, that make people feel they’re unacceptable. I wonder what the attitudes and attributes are that we are living out as a response to God’s love.

**TEAM REFLECTION**

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE** *You might like to name particular people, places and situations in the spaces….*

We pray to the Father of lights,

for people close to our hearts

and people who we will never meet

For people who need protection,

deliverance and freedom

For people who need hope

for their communities, their loved ones, their lives

For people who need healing

in body, mind and spirit

For people who need guidance

as leaders and as followers

For people who need to know your love

and for us who wish to share your love

with all

.

**SONG: Close to your heart (Psalm 15)** Richard Bruxvoort Colligan

*Alternative suggestion: Holy Spirit, go before us (TiS 420)*

**SENDING OUT AND BLESSING:**

Go out, and be doers of the Word.

Cleanse your hearts of all pollution,

be quick to listen and learn,

welcome the Word that God implants in you,

and bring it to birth in acts of righteousness and compassion.

And may God pour grace upon you and bless you forever;

May Christ Jesus reveal to you the truth of God’s ways;

and may the Holy Spirit fill your life with passion and love.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

 In the name of Christ. Amen.

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**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