**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE – Lent 2B**

**27th – 28thth February 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/72SWkalcFs0>

 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** by Moira Laidlaw

Welcome

Let us glorify God who created all things,

yet who hears and responds

to the cries of the weak and the needy,

We proclaim the glory of God

ruler over all nations,

whose greatness is revealed

in gracious and loving acts.

Let us worship and witness so faithfully

that future generations will believe

and glorify God in their hearts and with their lives.

Let us worship and praise God with thanksgiving in our hearts.

**OPENING PRAYER**

We pray, O God,

that today will be the time when we do hear you,

And that our hearts will not be hard or cold.

We pray rather, that our hearts will be warmed

and our lives energized by your spirit

so that we can worship you with our whole being.

Amaze us anew with the faithfulness of Abraham

and his belief in your staggering promises of a fruitful future.

Confront us afresh with wonder

at your desire to relate to humanity

through a covenant established by you.

We worship you, O God,

with awe, knowing that you care so much for us –

knowledge deepened and confirmed

through the bringing into being of a new covenant

through the suffering and death of Jesus.

Accept, we pray, this worship

which comes from thankful hearts,

for we offer it in Jesus’ name.

**SONG:** Come, now is the time to worship (Maranatha Singers)

Alternative song suggestion: TiS 52 Let us sing to the God of salvation

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION** by Moira Laidlaw

Gracious God,

you reached into Abraham and Sarah’s lives

and asked them to dream the impossible dream –

That you would transform what appears to have been a barren and lifeless situation

into one overflowing with promise and hope –

and through faith in you, they believed your promises.

Forgive us O God,

if we never get beyond thinking of your call on our lives

as an impossible dream or even an unwelcome interruption.

Faithful God,

the apostle Paul emphasizes Abraham’s complete trust and faith in your promises

and how we grow ever stronger in faith,

fully convinced of your ability to fulfil what had been promised.

Forgive us, O God,

when we find it hard even to hear your promises

above commercial assurances of transformation –

promises tempting us to trust the newest and trendiest product to realise our dreams.

Merciful God,

Jesus revealed the great depth of your love

in his determination to defeat evil

even when this meant giving up his own life,

Forgive us, O God,

when we allow the power of evil to flourish

because we fear that taking up one’s cross would be just too costly an exercise

*(silent reflection on these words)*

Gracious and loving God,

forgive our lack of trust in you;

Have mercy on us, and forgive us.

Help us when we hesitate,

and strengthen us when we are weak

Breathe your Spirit afresh into our hearts and minds,

our lives, so that we have the courage to follow Jesus

wherever he takes us. AMEN

**ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

“Faith was reckoned as righteousness ….. to us who believe in the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

who was handed over to death because of our sins and was raised for the sake of our righteousness.” Rom 4:20-25

Hear and believe these words about God’s amazing grace, grace experienced through Jesus‘ sacrificial love, as forgiveness of sins. AMEN

**BIBLE READINGS:** Genesis 17:1-7,15-16, Romans 4: 13-25,Mark 8:31-38

**GENESIS 17, “the Story”**

Ancestor to Many Nations from *Spill the Beans*

*When I was 75 God spoke to me, he told me that he would bless me, and that I would become the ancestor of a great nation. Sarai my wife was 65 then, we had never been blessed with children, but with God anything is possible, and I trusted him.*

*God called us to leave our home in Haran, and we did, we’ve been travelling for 24 years now, we’ve had many adventures, good times and bad. One night God spoke with me under the night sky and told me that my descendants would be as many as the stars. At my age and Sarai’s age it seems impossible but with God anything is possible, and I trusted him.*

*I’m 99 now and Sarai is 90, and we are still travelling. God spoke with me again last night and reminded me of his promise to make me an ancestor of many nations. God told me that he was giving me a new name, no longer Abram but Abraham, and Abraham means ancestor of a multitude. And Sarai is now to be called Sarah.*

*So here we are, still travelling, still wondering what God has in store for us. I know that God’s plans stretch far into the future that I will never see and often I find myself questioning the possibility that Sarah and I will ever have a child.*

*In years to come when they tell our story, let them remember that in old age we were loved by and important to God, who blessed us, surprised us, and called us on.*

**REFLECTION** based on *Spill the Beans*

In this story of Abram at 99, clearly, we are in the realms of mythistory (history mixed with myth). Abraham had to receive his new name and his new status as Father of the Jewish people. Within this broad framework, there are echoes of ordinary human experience in this story, and universal questions arising from them:

* If God intends Abram and Sarai to have descendants, why are they infertile?
* Why is there a 25 year delay between the initial promise (Genesis 12) and its fulfilment?
* Was Abram’s decision to have children with Hagar (Gen 16) due to lack of faith on his part?
* Or was it part of the divine plan?
* If God can…why does he not?
* If God wants us to be faithful, could he not make his intentions clearer?

The theme of Covenant links the Hebrew Scripture reading with the New Testament, and provides an ongoing focus for our journey through Lent. Once again we see a God who is faithful to his promises, and fully committed to his plans for his people, but who tests their faithfulness almost to breaking point because his ways and his timing are so different from ours.

Given the age profile of many church congregations, the story of Abram and Sarai, well told, should be an encouraging one. It may also serve as a corrective for the tendency to look only to young people as a source of hope for the future. Abram and especially Sarai, had long passed the point of seeing themselves as productive or creative, but God had other ideas. Their age gave them a different perspective on life; better able to see the long sweep of God’s activities in the world. It also took generosity on their part to invest in a future that they might not live to see. Like the medieval cathedral builders, they were prepared to put their energies into a project (the building of the nation) that would not come to fruition until long after they were gone. This contrasts with many of the church’s plans and projects, born out of desperation rather than faith, and looking for instant results rather than planting seeds and allowing God to take care of the harvest.

Being called into God’s service may be a high privilege, but it is never an easy ride – something that may be worth remembering as the church finds itself in a new phase of its collective life, called to venture into the wilderness, trusting God to keep company with us here.

If you are older, think about the younger generations around you and what you have been and are able to do for them. If you are younger, give thanks for what an older generation has done for you, and what you can offer by way of service to them.

**TEAM REFLECTION**

**SONG: Lord I lift your name on high** by Chet Valley

Alternative song suggestion: TiS 129 Amazing Grace

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE** from *Spill the Beans*

Whether we are nine or ninety- nine,

you have hopes and plans for us.

Whether we are old and wise or young and foolish,

the other way round or anything in- between,

You see our potential and want it to flourish.

Whether we are hopeful or hopeless,

super-confident or shaking in our boots;

Whether we believe it or not,

and certainly not because we deserve it,

you love us and want us to do well.

Help us to trust you,

and to follow, when you call us,

to infinity and beyond.

We are grateful for others

who have left a record of their stories;

Their hopes and dreams; their joys and sorrows;

your promises, and the extraordinary ways

in which they came to be fulfilled.

And for the story of Jesus,

in whose life our lives are reflected back to us,

as they are not yet but may one day become.

We pray for all who find themselves today at a sticking- point in their story,

not sure which way to go,

Or if the old signposts are reliable;

those who are finding it hard to go on hoping or waiting

for your promises to be kept.

Loving God,

if the story we have chosen to believe is true,

you are not just its author, but one of us;

One with us in all life’s twists and turns.

Remind us of that when the way is hard,

and faith is nigh impossible.

But remind us, too,

when the clouds lift and the sun begins to shine again, and life is good,

so that we can share our joy with you,

And give you the thanks and praise that you deserve.

In the name of Jesus AMEN

**SENDING OUT AND BLESSING:** from *Spill the Beans*

As we look to the future in the midst of present realities

our lives must reflect what God is doing within us.

As we walk with God in the midst of uncertain times,

his promise is to be always with us,

wherever we are,

at different stages of life,

following God’s call to us in the midst of our daily tasks,

living our faith in the light of the past,

and for the generation to come.

With thankfulness for our ancestors,

and in anticipation for the part we play today

for generations to come,

may we go with the assurance of God’s covenant

alive and well within us,

knowing that we are part of God’s story

AMEN

**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

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