**PENTECOST 22a – Proper 17a MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE**

**28 – 30 August 2020**

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/NDFYcHGxf1I>. 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.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Whatever time or day this is, wherever you are or from whatever tradition you are from – welcome to worship with the Macedon Ranges Uniting Churches.

The voice of God called to Moses from a blazing bush. He responded ‘Here I am’. God then warned Moses to come no closer and told him to take off his shoes, as he was standing on sacred ground.

We know that God is omnipresent, is everywhere but there are places and situations that seem more sacred than others. Sacred places are not all goodness and light or traditional places of worship but can be found in the nitty gritty of life.

Today we hear from Paul in his letter to the Romans about the marks of a Christian including how to create the sacred, by feeding your enemies. And in the Gospel of Matthew we catch up with Peter who has just declared that Jesus is the Messiah. But when Jesus forewarns of his death, Peter is angry as this is not the plan for the Messiah that he was expecting, and misses the sacred for human understanding.

So wherever your sacred space is in this moment, let us worship God.

**PRAYER OF ADORATION** *by © B D Prewer, used by permission*

Most loving God, as the new life of springtime prepares to awake around us, by your Holy Spirit awaken us to brighter hopes and livelier faith. While bird and beast and flower praise you by fulfilling what they are created to do, help us to lift up our hearts with the wonder and praise for which we were made. Stir the music in our hearts, so that songs may be on our lips. Arouse the neglected melody in our souls until our prayers and creeds turn a glad commitment. Through Christ Jesus, the joy of loving hearts.

***Amen!***

**A PRAYER FOR CHILDREN (BUT ALSO ALL THE REST OF US)**

Dear God,

You must have noticed

what bossy nerds

we can often be?

You know how eager we are

to tell others what they should do,

but we are full of silly excuses

when it comes to doing it ourselves.

There are some of our prayers

when we even tell you, God,

what you should do,

rather than listening

to what you want for us

and for other people around us.

Dear God,

please make us less bossy

and more content

to be humble and caring

like you special Son, Jesus.

*Amen!*

**OUR READINGS FOR TODAY**

Take a moment to read our readings for today: Exodus 3:1 - 15, Psalm 105:1 – 6, 23 – 26, 45c, Romans 12:9 – 21, Matthew 16:21 – 28.

**ROMANS 12:9-21** *Adapted from ©2002 Nathan Nettleton*[*LaughingBird.net*](http://laughingbird.net/)

*Question: What is it that distinguishes a new life in Christ?*

Answer: See to it that your love is for real and without pretence.

*Question: So, what actions reveal this life in Christ?*

Answer: Avoid corruption like the plague. Dig your heels in and don’t be budged from the side of good. Love one another, and not just in theory but with warmth and friendly affection. If you need something to compete over, see who can score the most points for treating everyone else like royalty. Don’t let your enthusiasm get slack, but keep yourselves on the boil and work hard for the Lord. Celebrate in anticipation of all that is to come. When you are being put through the wringer, tough it out, and pray all the harder. Do what you can to help out other Christians who are in need, and work at making strangers feel welcome and at home among you.

*Question: How should we then treat those who give us a hard time?*

Answer: When others persecute you, wish them all the best and pray that God will look after them. Seek the best for them; don’t wish disaster on them. When others are celebrating, celebrate with them. When others are hurting, share the pain with them. Stay in tune with one another, living a shared life based on common commitments. Don’t be full of yourselves, but hang out with those who the world writes off as nobodies. Don’t go getting over-inflated opinions about how smart you all are.

*Question: But what about those who abuse us?*

Answer: If anyone does the wrong thing by you, don’t go trying to pay them back in kind. Instead, take a deep breath and find a way to respond that anyone else would think of as going above and beyond the call of common decency. Do all that can be done at your end to live at peace with everyone else in the society around you. My dear friends, never take the law into your own hands to get revenge. Leave it up to God to sort the offenders out. As the scripture says, “Vengeance is my job, says the Lord, and I will give them what is coming to them.”

*Question: So then how do we do behave towards our enemies?*

Answer: So, follow the proverb instead: “If those who hate you are hungry, give them a feed; if they are thirsty, pour them a beer; because that’s the way to spark a meltdown in their heads.” Do not let what is evil get the upper hand over you, but get the upper hand over what is evil by doing what is good.

**REFLECTION** *by Rev Ian Pearse*

Three of the passages today relate in some ways to a call and to suffering. In the passage from Exodus Moses is called to a burning Bush and given instructions by God about leading the Israelites out of oppression and slavery. Then in the Matthew reading, starts with the words ‘from that time on’. It’s a time when Jesus sets his eyes on Jerusalem and for what must happen – that there's going to be suffering, persecution and death.

There is a call in this for all of us as well on how to follow Jesus - that we need to deny ourselves and take up our cross and, by inference, suffer as well.

Then we come to the Romans reading, which is an interesting reading in that it begins with verse 9 that says, “Let love be genuine” and then goes on to express all the ways in which we can express love, for one another. It reminds me of Corinthians 13 with the love message there - that love is patient, love is kind, and also the Galatians list of the gifts of the Spirit. And so Paul in writing to the Romans he's reminding them of the love that they need to have for everyone.

In all of these passages there is a sense of suffering - that Moses is going to suffer in going back into Egypt - that Jesus has set his eyes on Jerusalem and the suffering that's going to happen there. And then in this Romans reading there is this sense of suffering as well.

My understanding is that Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians before all the suffering really starts in Rome. The persecution of the church had already started in parts of the Greek and Turkish world but, it hasn't started in Rome yet. But Paul is warning the local Christians in Rome that suffering is coming and how to respond to that suffering.

I was fascinated listening to the podcast of ‘By the Well’ this week where they talked of two types of suffering.

The first type of suffering was a suffering from oppression. We can see that in the ways in which the Jews suffered under a Nazi regime during WW 2. We see it in the suffering of the Hebrews in Egypt. We see the suffering of our First Nations people in the oppression that they have experienced over the years. It is suffering that is out of the recipients’ control.

But there is a second type of suffering. They suggest the sort of suffering which Jesus and Paul are talking about is a suffering which comes from an action. An action that actually challengers the sources of the oppression. We see this sort of suffering when we look at the actions of Martin Luther King junior, the actions of Mother Teresa, that they suffered in the work that they did but it was to bring about reconciliation, to bring down the oppressor, to expose the corruption. This is a very active understanding of suffering and in some ways this is where Paul is talking about in the suffering that he's says that the Roman church is going to experience but they're going to do it with rejoicing and hope, to be patient in their suffering, and to persevere in prayer.

So if this suffering is an action word, not something that we just experience as an oppressed people, but it's a suffering in responding to our call to be active in bringing about justice and hope in the world.

So the challenge for us as a church in today’s world is where we see the oppression, where we see the injustice - how do we honour our call to bring about hope, peace and love to the situations we find ourselves in? Bearing in mind that this could involve giving up something of ourselves and being an active sufferer, to bring about God’s love into the world.

**PRAYER FOR OTHERS** by Trevor Turnham (as adapted by Rev Peter Cannon)

Creator God, we pray for our wonderful world that you have created and that humanity has changed. We pray for those currently facing devastating wild fires, the effects of flooding rains and mud slides, of droughts and starvation.

***We wait in our sacred space for your hand of support.***

God of wisdom, we pray for those in positions of leadership, whether they be in government, church, school, business or associations. We pray that they may be provided with the humanity, compassion and wisdom that was shown by Jesus.

***We wait in our sacred space for your guidance and love.***

Compassionate God, we pray for those who are lonely, aged, infirm and concerned about their future.  For those who are finding the current restrictions placed upon them so difficult to live with, we pray that they may be comforted.

***We wait in our sacred space for the comfort of your presence.***

God of life, we pray for those who are facing all the concerns associated with the current pandemic. Those who are suffering in isolation, worried about their future, confronting grief or dealing with the imposed dramatic changes to work, study and restrictions we pray for patience and grace.

***We wait in our sacred space confident in your Spirit’s calling to life and grace.***

**THE LORD’S PRAYER**

Say the Lord’s Prayer.

**BLESSING by** *© 2003 Paul Chalson*

God give hope to

Lift you up

Guide you in

The pathways of peace

Fill you with joy

To brighten the dark

Enfold you in love

And guard you through danger

God our beginning

And our end

Saviour, brother,

Helper and friend

Bless you now

And forever more

And guide you in the way of Christ

**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.*