**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE**

**11 - 13 September 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/3gISzt_L5Nk>. 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**

Bless this time of worship, wherever you are, what time of day or night

Be the light to guide our pathway in uncertain times

Be the sound of redemptive waters to sooth our souls today

Be the voice of wisdom calling out in our wilderness

Be the love in our homes and in our communities

Bless this time of worship, oh Lord, wherever we are, day or night.

**PRAYER OF ADORATION**

I will sing my heart out to the Lord

Lord you are praised for your greatness

You hurl my fears and their ways to haunt me into the sea of oblivion

I will sing my heart out to the Lord

Lord of my strength and my defense.

You take away my anguish and its damage to me

And I praise my God.

I will sing my heart out to the Lord

You are my redemption, my salvation my all.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND WORD OF ASSURANCE**

**A Prayer – Michael Leunig from “When I Talk to You – A Cartoonist Talks to God”**

Dear God,

We struggle, we grow weary, we grow tired. We are exhausted, we are distressed, we despair. We give up, we fall down, we let go. We cry. We are empty, we grow calm, we are ready. We wait quietly.

A small, shy truth arrives. Arrives from without and within…

Arrives and is born. Simple, steady, clear. Like a mirror, like a bell, like a flame. Like rain in summer. A precious truth arrives and is born within us. Within our emptiness.

We accept it, we observe it, we absorb it. We surrender to our bare truth. We are nourished, we are changed. We are blessed. We rise up.

For this we give thanks, Amen

**Loving God,**

Open our ears that we may hear your wisdom in these uncertain times

Open our hearts to have compassion on those less sure and less secure in their understanding

Although we cannot be together Open our arms in prayer to our communities, particularly those in lockdown.

Open our minds to remember the words of comfort from Jesus, to be loving as he loves us and to be forgiving of others as God forgives us. In Jesus’ name Amen

**OUR READINGS FOR TODAY**

Take a moment to read our readings for today: Exodus 14:19 - 31, Psalm 114 or Exodus 15.1b-11, 20-21, Romans 14:1-12, Matthew 18:21 – 35. We explore in our video discussion the Exodus story, the Matthew story and the Romans reading.

**REFLECTION** *by Pastor Annette Buckley*

You stand on the edge, and wonder how on earth you are going to meet this challenge. This is a barrier of unimaginable proportions. You know that God has been with you, but even that gives you no courage now. Indeed, in the last little while you’ve been wishing you could go right back. What had seemed to be a stepping out into a life of freedom has turned into a nightmare of one difficulty after another. Now, the powers that enslaved you are right behind you, breathing death and violence, with vengeance in their eyes, and you have nowhere to turn.

*Where there is no way forward, God will make a way forward*

God acts. In the midst of your despair and confusion, in the midst of your yearning for the safety of the known, even when it trapped you and offered you only heartache and misery, in the midst of your flickering faith that has burned down to the ashy remnants of an ancient fire…God acts. Shrouded in mystery, more powerful than you dared to imagine, God cuts through and provides a path.

*Where there is no way forward, God will make a way forward.*

All that is left is for you to take that step which is a leap into the unknown. Your companions are beside you on the way, each of you gently cradling the tiny fragment left to you of the hope that bore you here. It is enough. Your feet on solid ground move, gradually finding footholds for your returning strength. Together you walk on, the encroaching walls that would swamp you were it not for the power of the One who loves and guides you gradually become less frightening. You are safe. You have been brought through the impossible by the God whose promises have never failed.

*Where there is no way forward, God will make a way forward.*

I wrote these words as a reflection on the crossing of the sea, described in our Exodus reading for today, but I wonder if you might read it again with the Matthew reading in mind, as a reflection on the barriers that can arise between people. I don’t know about you, but I have been in situations where I thought that I could never be reconciled to someone whom I perceived as being hurtful, as owing me a debt of contrition and repentance. While acknowledging that forgiveness needs to walk hand-in-hand with the accountability, discipline and justice that the text prior to this discusses, I wonder whether we can trust God to help us find a way forward. If we are to live as the community of faith that embodies God’s love, justice and mercy in the world we will strike moments of difficulty, seemingly impassable barriers. I wonder, when these arise, whether we can trust the God who has led us out of the slavery of our own self-interest. Do we look over our shoulders, wanting to go back where it was safe and known? Or are we prepared to take that step which is a leap of faith, to risk change, renewal, regeneration? Perhaps we’ll stay stuck on the shore in fear, missing the call and the chance to live into the life promised us as God’s reconciling community, grounded in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, inspired by the Spirit’s song…

*Where there is no way forward, God will make a way forward.*

**Questions:**

1. Have you ever faced what you thought was an impassable barrier? Either a real, physical one or a mental/emotional/spiritual one? What happened?
2. In the story, the Israelites had just see God act powerfully in delivering them from the Egyptians, yet they had wanted to go back to the relative ‘safety’ of Egypt rather than continuing into the unknown with God’s guidance. Why do you think we need to keep being reminded of God’s goodness/care/mercy/strength?
3. “Forgiveness simply means loving someone enough to pursue healing instead of punishment when they have wronged you” *Dave Willis.org*

“Forgive others, not because they deserve forgiveness, but because you deserve peace.” – *Jonathon Lockwood Huie*

“Forgiveness is simply about understanding that every one of us is both inherently good and inherently flawed. Within every hopeless situation and every seemingly hopeless person lies the possibility of transformation” – *Desmond Tutu*

Which of these quotes, if any, do you most resonate with. What would you say about forgiveness if someone asked you?

**PRAYER FOR OTHERS - A CORONAVIRUS PRAYER** *by © Sister Christine Koelhoffer, IHM*, https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/coronavirus-prayers#Top

Loving God, Your desire is for our wholeness and wellbeing.

We hold in tenderness and prayer the collective suffering of our world at this time.

We grieve precious lives lost and vulnerable lives threatened.

We ache for ourselves and our neighbours, standing before an uncertain future.

We pray, may love, not fear, go viral.

Inspire our leaders to discern and choose wisely, aligned with the common good.

Help us to practice social distancing and reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.

Call us to profound trust in your faithful presence,

You, the God who does not abandon.

**PRAYER FOR STRENGTH** *by © B D Prewer*

*Joy of loving hearts*

*whenever I tremble on the brink*

*of a most difficult decision.*

*Save me from being taken in*

 *by superficial appearances*

 *Or by subtle self-deceits.*

*Give me a clear head,*

 *A strong and persistent will,*

 *and a serene heart.*

*By your enabling grace*

 *and to your service and praise. Amen*

**THE LORD’S PRAYER**

Say the Lord’s Prayer.

**WE SING: Have faith in God** *by Geoff Bullock*

**BLESSING**

*The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Numbers 6:22-26*

**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.*