**16th February 2020 6th Sunday after Epiphany**

**A short but structured service**

*(other suggestions and alternatives are below)*

**Gathering**

**Call to worship**

This is a good place for it; this is a good day,

here and now we come to re-set our sights on the love of God.

***God is ready and willing***

***to change our minds,***

***unscramble our motives,***

***and to focus again our purest longings.***

This is a good place for it; this is a good time;

here and now we are in the presence of amazing grace;

***God is ready and willing***

***to bring hope to the disconsolate,***

***refreshment to the worn and the weary,***

***and new delight to those who walk in the way of the Lord.***

**Prayer of Approach**

God of Christ Jesus and our God, lift us above the mundane to the special, beyond empty platitudes to sincere praise, and awake in us that adoration which is the joy of loving hearts.

You are the God of grace and glory. We are yours, and by the miracle o grace, you are ours. Blessed be your name in all the earth!***Amen!***

**Hymn**

**Prayer of confession**

Let us seek God’s mercy, not cap-in-hand like servants ordered before a hard master, but as little children come to the knee of a loving parent. Let us pray.

Loving God, we ask your forgiveness for everything that has been grubby in our lives, and for anything that has been less than the best.

***If we have been so caught up in our own affairs, that we have not noticed the worry lines on the face of a friend or family member, please forgive us.***

If we have harboured jealousy, or been resentful and bitter with those who have ignored us or patronised us, please forgive us.

***If we wilfully gone back on our word, or have broken our promises by becoming so busy on other matters that we have forgotten what we pledged, please forgive us.***

If we have withheld the truth, or been deceitful and dishonest, or conspired against someone for our own advantage, please forgive us.

***If we have publicly pledged loyalty to our Lord’s commandments, yet looked for devious loopholes in order to dodge duties that go against our personal likes, please forgive us.***

If we have lapsed back into self-justifications, rather than facing the ugly truth, repenting and trusting your salvation, please trip us up and bring us to our senses. For you a alone are the one who can see through all our subterfuge, confront and liberate, heal and restore us to fullness of life. Through Christ Jesus our Saviour.

***Amen!***

**Word of assurance**

Here is a word you can utterly trust: “God did not send his son to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved”

***“If we confess our sins, God is stays faithful and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all ungodliness.”***

***Thanks be to God!***

*(often the Psalm may be used for the prayer and/or the word of grace)*

**Service of the Word**

**Psalm for the day – Psalm 119:1 – 8** *B. D. Prewer 2006*

If you have walked God’s road blamelessly,

full-on happiness is yours,

if you have followed Christ, never looking back,

you are among the choicest saints.

But if you have sincerely tried yet sometimes failed,

you are still numbered among the happy.

If you have sought God with your whole heart,

you can count your many blessings.

Commandments are given for our own good,

to be embraced diligently.

God help us to keep our focus and our love,

that we may stay steady under pressure.

We know that if we keep our eyes on the goal,

we will never live to regret it.

We will be able to praise God with a clear conscience,

and go on to learn more of our Lord’s ways.

**Epistle or Old Testament/alternate reading: Deut. 30: 15-20 or 1 Corinthians 3:1- 9**

**Gospel reading: Matthew 5:21 – 37**

**Short reflection and discussion** *(see links below)*

(Hymn)

**Prayers for others**

**Sharing of concerns**

**Sharing of notices**

**Prayers**

\* Let us pray for the church, at home and abroad.

God of surprises, continue to have mercy on your church.

Let your Spirit move among the ranks of its many denominations,

by your fire forge links of love,

by your wind impel it into service for your world.

Where it is in error, convert it.

Where it is indifferent, re-awaken it.

Where it is corrupt, cauterise it.

Where it is persecuted, fortify it.

Where it is insightful, faithful and loving,

bless it with your holy joy.

\* Let us pray for those people, present among or around the world, who are “doing it tough” against heavy odds.

God of high hopes and deep comfort, be with your world family

for whom this day brings hardship, tragedy, sickness, road accidents,

homelessness, or broken hearts.

With your light guide them.

With your hand uplift them.

With your Spirit comfort them.

With your grace save them.

With your love enfold them.

With your peace garrison their hearts and minds

against all evil.

God of surprises,

should any of us become switched-off to the sufferings of others,

should any of us retreat into selfish and safe pre-occupations,

confront us again with the Cross,

deliver us from either dithering, or from rash actions,

and tutor us how to best be your agents of justice and mercy.

Through Christ Jesus our hope and our joy.

*Amen!*

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Sending forth the people of God**

**Offering** (a sharing of our gifts and the call to bless others as we have been blessed)

**Hymn**

**Blessing and commissioning**

That the world may know it is not hopeless,

and be assisted to raise the bar of its spiritual and ethical expectations,

***We go in the Spirit of Christ Jesus***

To see what needs to be done and to do it graciously,

to accept what cannot as yet be done, and to relax easily,

and to help others to take courage, without patronising them,

***We go in the Spirit of Christ Jesus.***

The limitless grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the indiscriminate providence of our loving God,

and the comforting yet disturbing friendship of the Holy Spirit,

will be with us today

and forever more.

***Amen!***

\*Note: all prayers and litanies above, are courtesy ©B D Prewer. It was Bruce’s intention that the prayers and litanies be adapted by each user to their own situation. This material can only be used for worship with acknowledgement and not otherwise reproduced without permission. Thank you to the estate of Bruce Prewer for allow us to publish his material here. Contact <http://www.bruceprewer.com> for details.

**A shorter prayer service**

*(may include some of the above material in the following format. Hymns may be included if desired and music is available)*

Greet each other

Prayer (may include invocation, adoration, confession and recognition of grace)

Reading: Psalm 119:1 – 8

Gospel reading: Matthew 5:21 – 37

Sharing and discussion of the readings

Sharing of concerns

Prayers for others (see above, may involve one or several people praying; may involve the use of symbolic actions as part of the prayers)

(Conclude with the Lord’s Prayer)

Blessing

***Howard Wallace suggests for using the Psalm in worship*** *(see****:*** [*http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/*](http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/)*):*

The beginning of the psalm can be used as either a general **call to worship** or with the addition of the threefold blessing at the end, and using the word ‘Blessed’ instead of ‘Happy’, it could be used as the final **blessing**:

Happy (Blessed) are those whose way is blameless,   
who walk in the law of the LORD.   
Happy (Blessed) are those who keep his decrees,   
who seek him with their whole heart,   
who also do no wrong,   
but walk in his ways.   
[And the blessing of God,   
Father, Son and Holy Spirit   
be with you, now and forever.   
**Amen**]

Verses 4 and 8 could be used as part of a response during the **prayer of confession**:

You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.   
***O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!***

We will observe your statutes;   
***do not utterly forsake me.***

Howard often uses the NRSV but other versions can be used such as Nathan Nettleton’s paraphrase (found at <http://www.laughingbird.net/LaughingBird/Welcome.html>), The Message, Bruce Prewer’s adaptations (both paraphrases) or the New Living Translation. The Message and New Living Translation are accessible via [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

**For sermon and/or reflection preparation**

Pilgrim Theological College has launched a new web site with podcasts starting with reflections on Advent and preaching in the Year of Matthew. The podcasts continue for Epiphany and are planned to be published into the coming year. Go to <http://bythewell.com.au/>. There is a new one each week and are produced about 2 weeks before the particular Sunday being addressed. These are a great resources, are easy to understand and access. You could easily play them in your service and then invite discussion afterwards. Be aware though that each one goes for over 20 minutes and are geared for those preparing to preach or lead a reflection. Each discussion (podcast) explores many ideas and issues in the passage examined so you may want to pick one of these to develop.

Other good sermon resources and even full sermons are found at <http://benedictus.com.au> and <http://www.laughingbird.net/LaughingBird/Welcome.html>. The Benedictus site is from the Benedictus Church in Canberra, an ecumenical community that uses meditative and contemplative practices as part of their worship and life. Their “reflections” page has sermons in text format and more recent sermons in downloadable mp3 format. The latter could be listened to by the congregation and then discussed or just use it as a full sermon. The *Laughingbird* site is administered by Nathan Nettleton, from the South Yarra Baptist Church and has sermons in text form collected over many years. Most are by Nathan but many are also by many excellent Biblical scholars.

**Songs which may bring deeper reflection are** – lots to consider:

TIS 547/AHB 455 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

TIS 598/AHB 519 Dear Father, Lord of humankind

TIS 111 /AHB 28 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

TIS 587/AHB 503 Fold to your heart your sister and your brother

TIS 609/AHB 537 May the mind of Christ my Saviour

TIS 64/AHB 63 O bless the Lord, my soul

TIS 654 When love is found (and hope comes home) note: this marvellous contemporary hymn is to the tune of *"O Waly, Waly' (The Water is Wide)*

TIS 421 Where the Spirit is

CH 4/CH 198/various All are welcome *(do a little search in your browser for this one for sources – a great song and well known)*

ATN 99 Pentecost Prayer *(a wonderful song found in the “All Together Series” of songs)*

TIS 168 For the fruits of all creation

David MacGregor has a range of contemporary songs. You may like to select one to learn. He often provides a downloadable mp3 file, music and lyrics for songs that are his own. His site is at: <https://togethertocelebrate.com.au/>

**Other Creative suggestions:**

* Visuals are very appropriate for most services. Art works can be used to draw people into the stories. <http://www.textweek.com/yeara/epipha6.htm> has links to artworks and movie suggestions related to the themes arising from the Bible readings. Some of these are by some of the greats and others by world class contemporary artists. This web site is highly recommended for wider worship resources but is going through a time of transition at the moment.
* Ann suggests a film clip from the movie “Tangled”. Her suggestions are as follows: *The Reluctant Reliance clip is a great little clip for use with the gospel reading - particularly the part about anger and reconciliation. It is very funny too. For this purpose it works best if you stop it at the bells and leave out the last kick - or talk specifically about that last kick in the light of what Jesus says about going to those who have/feel something against you.*
* The topics of anger leading to violence, the place people from different life situations have in our society and churches, relationships (consider maybe the approach of “reality” tv programs), judgement and justice and resolving conflicts are significant issues constantly in the media. Media articles or headlines can be used to stimulate conversation and reflections. Please be pastorally sensitive about how you do address these issues. There may be many who have been survivors of violence and injustice in your communities. Remember that simplistic and moralistic answers do not get to the heart of the passages or the Gospel message of grace, love and reconciliation.
* Jeff Shrowder suggests where you are using **Matthew 5:21-37:**  
  *Suggested symbols for the worship centre:  
  Copies of several Federal or State pieces of legislation, a bible open at, say, Exodus 20. Any other symbols appropriate to your context.  
  Place these symbols on a hessian cloth draped from the worship centre table onto the floor.*
* Seasons of the Spirit is a resource package available through Media Com. They have weekly resources available that can be purchased. They have great resources for all ages, creative ideas and thoughtful suggestions for reflection and sermon development. If you want to check it out, speak to Rev Peter or contact our Romsey congregation who use the material often*.*

**Other resources**

* See the Resources page of our web site, <https://www.macedonrangesunitingchurch.org.au/resources-and-event-diary> for an extensive list of links and other resources.
* Our Romsey congregation has access to Seasons of the Spirit materials. Contact Jay for details as to what is available.
* Bruce Prewer’s web site has sermons and prayers. Go to <http://www.bruceprewer.com/>.
* Nathan Nettleton’s site has paraphrase versions of the readings, sermons and prayers. Go to <http://www.laughingbird.net/LaughingBird/Welcome.html>.
* Ann Scull has some great suggestions for creative worship. Go to <http://seedstuff.blogspot.com.au/>.
* Sacredise is a great web site that has a huge range of resources. Go to <http://sacredise.com/>.
* David McGregor has some great suggestions for contemporary music and songs. Go to <http://togethertocelebrate.com.au/>
* Geoff Shrowder has suggestions for the use of the Psalm, often a thoughtful piece and suggestions for hymns. Go to <http://thebillabong.info/>.