**Worship 26 – 28 June 2020 – Pentecost 13a (Proper 8a)**

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/WTRpNPtqg6k>.

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.

**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 not forgotten.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Just when we thought we could start returning to normal… The wait continues and we are challenged to be patient.

Our readings from the scriptures set us challenges too. Ancient stories that sit uncomfortably in a contemporary world. How do we respond to our heritage when ancient norms are challenged by contemporary values? There are arguments over freedom, often misconstrued by self-interest. And demands of obedience with calls to sacrifice. Subtle lines between true discipleship and cultic abuse.

As the people of God, we come to explore honestly, with questions, sharing journey and open to the move of the Spirit together. We come to worship the One who opens up a new way, even while that way may be unclear or uncertain.

*Pause to reflect*

*(inspired by Psalm 13)*

How long do we have to put up with all this?

The struggles of life seem to continue day after day.

At such times we feel very alone.

God come.

God help us.

God restore us.

**OPENING PRAYER:**

In the midst of all we face

It is you who provides life and joy.

And so we continue to seek after you and your Spirit.

**PSALM 13 –** *Peterson, E. H. (2005).* [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](https://ref.ly/logosres/message?ref=Bible.Ps13.1&off=0&ctx=A+David+Psalm%0a~1%E2%80%932%C2%A0+13%C2%A0Long+enough%2c+God%E2%80%94%0a) *(Ps 13:1–6). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.*

1–2 Long enough, God—

you’ve ignored me long enough.

I’ve looked at the back of your head

long enough. Long enough

I’ve carried this ton of trouble,

lived with a stomach full of pain.

Long enough my arrogant enemies

have looked down their noses at me.

3–4 Take a good look at me, God, my God;

I want to look life in the eye,

So no enemy can get the best of me

or laugh when I fall on my face.

5–6 I’ve thrown myself headlong into your arms—

I’m celebrating your rescue.

I’m singing at the top of my lungs,

I’m so full of answered prayers.

**CONFESSION** *© B D Prewer (adapted), used by permission*

Regretfully but sincerely, loving God, we confess that we don’t often live in the style of Jesus;

***Too readily we adjust to the values and attitudes of the rest of the community; sometimes there is nothing distinctive or winsome about us.***

Regretfully, loving God, we confess that we do not make the most of our faith;

***In the times we have to ourselves in this busy life, we do not make space for reflection and prayer; we leave you at the edges instead of embracing you at the centre of our days.***

Regretfully, loving God, we unfold our lives before you.

***Please forgive and expunge the things that are sloppy, unloving or rotten.***

***Please mend the things that are torn or distorted or fractured.***

***Please rehabilitate that soul-image of yourself that exists in each of us, and give us the desire and the will and the strength to make a good fist of living by faith in this new week.***

In the name of Christ Jesus our Saviour, we pray.

***Amen!***

**FORGIVENESS**

In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I ask you to accept God’s saving love, putting your sins and mistakes behind you, and letting go of regrets and fears. Now face the future with the measured optimism of those who know they are destined to ultimate victory. By saving love you are released; you are at liberty!

*Thanks be to God!*

**OUR READINGS FOR TODAY:** Take a moment to read our other readings for today, Genesis 22:1 – 14, Matthew 10:40 – 42 and Romans 6:12 – 23.

**REFLECTION** *by**Ps Annette Buckley*

…God tested Abraham…

I wonder if the idea of ‘testing’ sends a shiver down your spine. Most of us were introduced to tests at school, and not many of us liked them. The language of ‘testing’ that first comes to mind is about passing or failing. Tests bring sweaty palms, quicker breathing, and a sense that we might not be worthy.

Of course, at the moment, there’s a different kind of testing that is more likely to be on our minds…testing for COVID-19. With this kind of test, it isn’t about how good we are, or whether we’ve done our homework. It’s purely about giving us information about our situation so that we know how we can proceed. There’s also the need to test any vaccines or medication that might be found, to make sure that they work well and don’t have any serious side-effects. Similarly, we’re very grateful to the people who test car safety or the structural capacity of building components, and the like.

The idea of God testing us doesn’t sit at all comfortably with me if it’s the kind of testing that yields a pass or fail result. “Are you good enough?” “Are you in or out?”…these don’t seem to be the kinds of questions that God ponders while looking at the Creation and deciding that it is indeed good. But God testing to allow us to make a frank assessment of what we’re made of? That makes more sense to me. I might wander through life, congratulating myself that I am patient or generous or not-at-all racist. Unless I come across situations where those things are tested, though, how am I to really know?

I quite like the idea that the emphasis in this story is on God’s generous provision. It is also, perhaps, a counter to the religions of the time that had child sacrifice as part of their rituals. This story shows that the God of Abraham intervenes to stop child sacrifice. It is also a neat ‘bookend’ to Abraham’s story, showing him giving up his past family to follow God at the start of his journey, and being prepared to give up his future family (through Isaac) near the end of it. These are all helpful ways of hearing this story, especially if we’re concerned about a God who might think that putting a father and son through such torture is cruel.

I don’t want to ignore the difficulty of this story, though, or its capacity to make us feel uneasy. I think it needs to remind us that a life of faith is not always simple and straightforward, and that the work of listening for God’s voice is an ongoing task. It’s a task that we do together, and we do it in the light of God’s continuing revelation in the Scriptures, in the Spirit, in the world in which we live.

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS** *© B D Prewer (adapted), used by permission*

Most loving God, you have put it in our hearts to pray for one another.

***Please hear our prayers, correct their errors, and bless all that is wise and loving.***

We pray for the young and the strong, and all who are full of joy and high hopes today.

***We pray for the elderly and the weak, and all who are utterly weary and disheartened today.***

We pray for the wise and the generous, and those who are looking for new challenges today.

***We pray for the foolish and the selfish, and those who evading their responsibilities today.***

We pray for peace-keepers and peacemakers, and all who work for justice and peace today.

***We pray for the hostile and the treacherous, and all who will resort to violence today.***

We pray for the well housed and well fed, and those who share their good fortune today.

***We pray for the homeless and the hungry, and all whose plight is ignored today.***

We pray for the patient and the merciful, and all who will make new friends today.

***We pray for the hasty and the judgmental, and all who will create some misery today.***

We pray for the healthy and the buoyant, and those who will share much happiness today.

***We pray for the dying and the sad, and those who will weep inconsolably today.***

We pray for the faithful and the loving, and all who will worship with delight today.

***We pray for the faithless and the cynical, and all who will find life a drag today.***

We pray for our loved ones and our friends, and those whom we will meet casually today.

***We pray for strangers and enemies, and those who will think evil of us today.***

Loving God, please bring the day nearer when our prayers and our deeds will work in perfect harmony,

***and we will be a blessing to all those whose lives touch ours. Through Christ Jesus our Saviour.***

***Amen!***

**BLESSING: God give hope** *© 2003 Paul Chalson, used by permission*

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.*