**Worship Liturgy for Easter 6a Macedon Ranges Partnership**

**16th – 17th May 2020**

And so we continue on our Easter Resurrection journey, encountering the Risen one who offers abundant life for all. This invitation brings struggle but also hope for those willing to step out. The Spirit is promised as a reassurance of faith.

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/8\_vGmDRIjFw.

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 all the scripture readings in one way or another this week.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Yes, we have and are going through some hard times

Isolation can be frustrating and tough

Ironically, at this time of social separation,

we have not been left alone

God wants to be known by us and is always within reach

**PRAYER**

Spirit of Life, you hear our cries and speak up for us in our time of need

We honour and celebrate you

You sustain and guide us in the way of life

We honour and celebrate you

Your love never ceases and never leaves us

We honour and celebrate you

**CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF GRACE**

In the midst of all the noise of information and analysis it can be hard to see clearly. It can be like groping around in an unfamiliar dark place. Our scripture passages remind us of our need of you God. We need your Spirit to guide and comfort us.

It is easy at such times to be overwhelmed with the noise and clutter. Use this moment of reflection to provide direction and clarity.

Holy Spirit we need you to open our eyes and ears to see and hear the way of life.

We thank you that even when we are lost

When we can’t see or hear

That we are reassured of your love for us. For no one is beyond your love and grace.

Amen.

**PAUSE TO READ THE READINGS FOR TODAY BEFORE PROCEEDING.** They are: Acts 17: 22-31, Psalm 66: 8-20, 1 Peter 3: 13-22 and John 14: 15-21.

**EASTER 6: Introduction to the Readings**

**Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood**

During this time of partial shutdown it's easy to lose track of which day it is and how far we have come in the month. In the Christian calendar we are half-way between Easter Day and Pentecost. I say "Easter Day" and not "Easter" because this is still the season Easter for Christians. Our first 2 readings for today, from Acts 17 and I Peter 3, reflect this, with their emphasis on the resurrection. In the 21st century we often hear people say that they try to "follow Jesus", as though that's all there is to being a Christian; but for the early Church to be a Christian meant to rejoice in the new life, the resurrection life, that Christ brings. The sermons by Peter and Stephen in the Book of Acts show the compulsion that these Christians felt to proclaim the new life in Christ.

In I Peter the writer says "be ready to make an accounting for the hope that is in you" (v. 15). We can't keep the faith to ourselves: it must be expressed, in good times and in bad. The Christians to whom this letter was written were having a hard time, in a pretty hostile environment. Witnessing to their faith wasn't easy. It's a bit like that today because the Church is on the nose for many Australians. The many good things that the Church does tend to be over-shadowed by the headlines about physical and sexual abuse in the Church. We have to acknowledge this, but also to continue our witness.

In Acts ch. 17 Paul went to Athens and made contact with their culture. His sermon made sense to some of his hearers at least, so they said "come back and tell us more". Like many Australians in today's health crisis, they were searching, searching for meaning, searching for reassurance, hoping to get a glimpse into the longer-term future.

The Gospel reading from John 14 records the promise of Jesus that we are not alone in the hard times of the Christian life. Jesus promises "another Advocate", the Holy Spirit, who supports and guides us. The Greek word is sometimes translated "counsellor" or "helper". He or she is the One who is always there, confirming and strengthening the hope we have in Christ's victory. Jesus said "I will not leave you orphaned" (v. 18).

When it comes to Pentecost this year, maybe we'll be celebrating the coming of the Spirit in a different way - that's something to think about this week.

**SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

In Acts 17 Paul demonstrates what it means to profess the gospel through the cultural lens of the community it is in. He uses common ‘art’ that is poetry and sculpture to add credence to his testimony. Is there a place for us to be using the ‘art’ of our culture to emphasis our theological stance?

From 1 Peter 3 we read, ‘submit yourself to every good authority’.  How has the restrictions we have had concerning the gathering together as church inform that Scripture?  How has our behaviour been a witness, positively or negatively to the wider community?

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS**: **Prayer in the time of Coronavirus**

*Denise Liersch, Moderator, Synod of VicTas 14 May 2020*

God of love, God of grace, God of surprises,

We are grateful for the moments of love and community we share.

We know you are with us. We know the promise we have in you.

Yet we live with our hurt in the present and uncertainty in the time ahead,

and wonder what the future holds for us and our communities.

We pour out our hearts and souls to you

… and pray:

for your world, your peoples and all who inhabit the face of the earth;

for those who are grieving for loss of loved ones,

for those who fear for their safety,

for those who feel most isolated and alone;

for those who give of themselves to support others:

health care workers, cleaners, teachers, truck drivers and delivery personnel,

pharmacists, grocery sales assistants, phone counsellors,

personal care assistants, those who prepare meals for emergency food relief

… bring your comfort, hope, strength, and healing love.

We pray for our communities of faith,

that we may be beacons of hopefulness, of promise, of peace with each other,

and of inclusive love for neighbour.

We pray in the hope we know in Jesus,

in whom we see and know the fullness of the grace and love of God.

Amen.

**SAY THE LORD’S PRAYER**

**BLESSING AND COMMISSIONING**

Some of the restrictions facing us are now being eased. Such changes brings hope. But as you go into the coming days, remember that our hope is grounded in someone who is beyond the moment. Our hope is found in one who’s love and grace know no bounds. Our hope is in the one who hears and understands all our needs.

So go then with confidence and courage.

Be a blessing to those you encounter.

Speak faith into despair.

Shine life into darkness.