**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE – Lent 1B**

**19th – 21st February 2021**

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/cqKRd0ANng8](https://youtu.be/cqKRd0ANng8" \t "_blank)

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.

**WELCOME and CALL TO WORSHIP**

Welcome to our worship this week, the first week of the Season of Lent. During this season, many Christians spend more time intentionally reflecting on their faith, perhaps focussing more on prayer, perhaps taking up a new spiritual practice, perhaps remembering Jesus’ journey to the cross, and committing themselves to walking beside Jesus more closely. All of this is done as a response to the God who first calls us into relationship with God and with each other.

In our worship this Lent, we will be focussing on the Hebrew Scripture stories of covenant, of God continually reaching out in love to humanity, and God’s promises in establishing a relationship with God’s people.

We hope and pray that the journey with us this Lent reminds you of a God who wants to gather the whole of humanity into an ever deeper relationship of love, grace, peace, justice and community.

Wherever you are, whenever you join us, whether you’ve lived a lifetime as a person of faith or if you don’t really know what you’re looking for, you are welcome. The Creator who reaches out in love and mercy calls you to join the journey that includes deluges and rainbows. The Beloved One calls you to walk in footsteps that lead to suffering for a broken world and entering with joy into new life. The Spirit calls you into a wilderness where you’ll be meet both tempters and angels. Take the first step. Join the journey with us.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION : SONG: Again and again** by The Many

Why are things so broken?

Again and again we pray..

When borders are being drawn,

and families torn at the seams

It’s getting harder and harder to see

what any of this means.

When hate is having its day,

and children are shot in the street;

sometimes there’s no way

death has lost its sting.

Why are things so broken?

Again and again we pray

Where has all the mercy gone?

The writing’s on the wall

We just wish that we could sleep.

We want to close our eyes,

we’re not who we want to be.

We look in the mirror

and we don’t like the face that we find,

we pray that you are listening,

God forgive us one more time.

Why are things so broken?

Again and again we pray

Where has all the mercy gone?

We are looking for your face,

we are calling out your name

and if we’re silent

even the stones will cry

Hold us, show us,

again and again;

your loving face

your love remains

Everything’s so broken…

…still your love remains

Alternative song suggestion: TiS 468 We are your people

**BIBLE READINGS:** Mark 1:9-15, Genesis 9:8-17 You may like to read today’s other readings: Ps 25:1-10, 1 Peter 3:18-22

**REFLECTION** *by Ps Annette Buckley*

“What are you giving up for Lent?” is a question that used to be asked as one of the most exciting days of childhood – Pancake Tuesday – approached each year. There were some serious answers, beyond the obvious “chocolate”. People who had been trying to rid their lives of a bad influence or habit often chose Lent as a kind of new New Year, a time to kickstart another resolution. For others, it was clear that the period of self-denial was going to end in them gorging on whatever they had missed out on in the previous six weeks.

The observation of Lent began when the early Church’s usual time for baptisms was Easter Day. The group of people to be baptised, the catechumenate, went through a period of prayer, studying the scriptures and fasting as they prepared themselves for this important event. The forty day period echoed the gospel accounts of Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness following his baptism, which was itself an echo of the 40 days of rain which set Noah’s ark adrift and the 40 years of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness with Moses. There are numerous other references to events happening for 40 days in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In time, those already baptised in the Church began to join the catechumenate in their period of fasting, prayer and study as a sign of solidarity and as a re-affirmation of their own faith journey and spiritual identity. As with many of the practices of the Church, the Reformation saw the Protestant Churches de-emphasise particular periods in the liturgical calendar such as Lent and Advent. When I was a child, it was only the arrival at school of the Roman Catholic children, with smudgy grey foreheads, that signalled that there was anything important happening after the pancake feast of the previous night.

Along with a renewed interest in the seasons of the Church’s year, many in the Church are reclaiming the practice of observing Lent as a time of focused reflection. The emphasis is not on giving something up for a particular, difficult time. The hope is that Christians will use the time of Lent to refocus on their faith in a way that is genuinely transformative and sustainable. There are suggestions of giving up bad practices such as gossiping, arguing, driving short distances instead of walking, and so on. There are suggestions of taking up good practices: more regular prayer, daily meditation, a daily walk, being grateful, connecting with people in a different and deeper way, and many more

Our lectionary readings over this Lenten season will prompt us to think about the covenants God has made with humanity and Creation in our scriptures. Each of them sees God reaching out first, God offering a new relationship, God making a promise and asking us to respond. The God of love and grace is constantly reaching out to us, and any given moment can mark the beginning of a new or renewed relationship with God. Human as we are, we can need a nudge out of the rut we have made for ourselves, and times such as Lent might be the prompt we need to realign, revitalise or reimagine what our life of faith is about.

The invitation is to take a step, no matter how small. Pause and listen to the call of God, prompting you to move towards the vision God has of a kin-dom of peace, justice, love, inclusion, mercy and grace, and of your place there. What step can you take in that direction today and in the coming weeks? If you’d like some prompts, this article has some helpful ideas: <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/help-for-your-lenten-journey-this-year/?fbclid=IwAR1CcP82c9fKLdVghv1wXakqK3cHtUPlsYFBrEbSE-PHhBstF6ltX7ujpaY> (nb this link doesn’t seem to take you to the page directly, but you can cut and paste it into your browser and it will work)

**TEAM REFLECTION**

**PREPARING FOR MORE** by Dale Ryan

A reflection on why Lent should prepare us for abundance, not scarcity.

**SONG: See yourself** by Robin Mann, performed by NCYC 2003 band

Alternative suggestion: TIS 684 Love will be our Lenten calling

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS**

Let’s pray as we go out into our week:

Holy and loving God,

May we be alive to the signs of your presence in the world

Help us look for ways to sing the rainbow to others we meet

Shining the light of your love into any darkness.

When Christ goes into the wilderness

may we find ways to work beside him

Where others are overwhelmed by life’s storms

may we bring hope and healing

Where the Spirit goes ahead of us

enabling reconciliation and renewal

may we follow with humility

May our Lenten journey bring us closer to you

so that we may better serve the world that you love.

In the name of your Beloved we pray. Amen.

**Blessing:**

May you be blessed

By the Father who knows your true self

By the Son who knows your true struggles

By the Spirit who knows your true strength

Amen.

**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.*