**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE – Lent 5B**

**19th – 21st March 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/VE9wmzyUTCA

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** & **CALL TO WORSHIP**

Welcome to worship with the Macedon Ranges Partnership of the Uniting Church this week, the 5th Sunday of Lent.

I wonder what you bring with you to this time of worship? Is your heart heavy with the difficult stories in our world this week; stories that take courage to tell and to listen to with compassion? Are your spirits lifted by the beauty of the natural world, have you shared special moments with people who bring light and love into your life? Have you been challenged by life’s difficulties, new or ongoing? Have you had reason to celebrate - small joys or enormous ones?

Whatever your circumstances, we welcome you to this time of worship. Here is a place where you might have God’s loving way written on the fabric of your heart. Here is a place where you might find the abundant life that springs from the dark earth of death. Here is a place where you might find the grace that will not let you go. Here is a place where you might find yourself, because the Holy Three-in-One is calling you into the community of love.

I invite you to think for a moment about the glory of God

…the glory contained in a single seed

…the glory we can see in the dark places

…the glory we see in God’s loving community together

…the glory we see as God brings forth new life into the world

…the glory we see of God’s abundance,

…the hope that springs when we see God’s promises fulfilled

…the glory of Jesus who told stories about simple things

…the glory of the Spirit that moves gently in us and through us

**PRAYER of CONFESSION: Psalm 51** ©2001 Nathan Nettleton LaughingBird.net

O God, your love never gives up.  
Have mercy on me now!

I’m relying on your record of generous mercy:  
please wipe my slate clean!

Scrub away the filth I’ve been living in;  
Scour away the stain of my sin.

I know only too well what I’ve done;  
my sins stare me in the face.

It is you I’ve double-crossed, you I’ve betrayed;  
I’ve done things which I knew you despised.

You have all the facts and you know what I deserve;  
what ever you decide is fair enough.  
I’ve been on the wrong side of you forever.  
I turned my back on you before I was born.

You want honesty that comes from deep within,  
so teach me your wisdom,  
let it take root in my heart.

Get the bleach out and give me the treatment!  
Soak me and wash me  
until I’m as white as snow.

Open my ears to laughter and music.  
Though you ground me into the dirt,  
let me now rise to the sounds of joy.

Turn a blind eye to my record;  
disregard my prior convictions.

Renovate me from the inside, O God;  
rebuild my heart and rewire my brain;  
install in me a new fault-free operating system.

Don’t cut me off from you now,  
or withdraw your Holy Spirit from me.

Rekindle in me the joy of being safe in your care,  
and fill me with an insatiable desire to follow you.

**SONG:** *Make a new heart (Psalm 51)* by Richard Bruxvoort Colligan

Alternative suggestion: TiS 568: O for a heart to praise my God

**BIBLE READINGS:** **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, Psalm 51:1-12, Hebrews 5:5-10, **John 12:20-33**

**REFLECTION** By Ps Annette Buckley

I wonder whether you’ve seen the movie *Hidden Figures*…it was released a couple of years ago. It tells the story of some African-American women who played a pivotal role in the NASA mission to put a person into orbit around the earth. Based on a true story, it focussed, in particular, on three women, one of whom was Katherine Johnson. Katherine was a gifted mathematician, and had been fortunate to have teachers who recognised her abilities and encouraged her to take pathways that would enable her to use her gifts. Despite this, the movie showed the difficulties that women like her and her friends faced in a world that didn’t recognise them

as equals. The white men and women were often hostile and unhelpful, and Katherine and her friends had to constantly assert their rights to be treated with dignity and respect. This was just one battle in the long fight for racial and gender equality, which continues today. Alongside them, people are calling out for rights for First Peoples, people with disabilities, people who are aging, people who identify as LGBTQI and more. Our news has been filled with stories that demand we attend to the plight of people who have been marginalised, and worse, for so long.

Two things about our readings made me think about this story. One was the great loss to the whole human family of the gifts, experiences and wisdom of other little girls like Katherine. We are all poorer because our community wasn’t able to recognise their potential or provide them with the support that would help them to flourish. It is bad enough that individuals suffer discrimination and oppression, but we are robbing whole communities of potential leaders, poets, teachers, engineers…. by holding on to power and privilege so tightly. If we would only let the grain fail to the ground and die, we could see a great flourishing that would help the whole human family.

The other is the complete and utter graciousness of a God who sees that *we* have been the ones who have broken the covenant, and yet still extends to us the promise of a new and even better relationship. Instead of getting angry and abandoning us, God moves even closer, with an even wider embrace.

What would it look like if those of us with power and entitlement were able to be the ones always moving towards, always opening our arms wider, always offering ways to deeper relationships, and always ready to sacrifice our privilege for the glory of God?

Listen…can you hear it…? *That’s* the call into life with God. *That’s* the call into life without limits. Here and now.

What’s do we think is standing in our way?

**TEAM REFLECTION**

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:**

We pray for those…

who scatter seeds of new life into the world

who live with abundance and need to learn how to share and let go

whose futures are cut short by the cruelty of others

mourn for chances that have slipped through their fingers

who are ground down by the difficulties of daily life

whose hopes and dreams have turned to dust

who feel as if they are constantly being pummeled

who are placed into difficult situations, and rise to the occasion

who share what they have to feed a hungry world.

…and we give thanks that in all of this,

you are present, God,

giving yourself to your world

Amen

**SONG:** *Help us accept each other (*TiS 648)

**SENDING OUT AND BLESSING:**

So go into your day, into your week,

prepared for the people you meet

who are wishing to see Jesus,

Share with them the Torah of God

written on your heart and in your life

hold out the hope that springs from sacrifice

the strength that comes from vulnerability

and the compassion that pours from God’s gracious heart.

And may you be blessed in ways you have never imagined

by the God whose law is love

whose path is love

whose desire for you and the world

is love. 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
* Mia Mia – Kyneton: Commonwealth bank, B.S.B. 063 517, Account no.: 1002 1775