**22nd March 2020 4th Sunday of Lent Year A**

**A short but structured service**

*(other suggestions and alternatives are below)*

**Gathering**

**Call to worship**

Some people have excellent eyesight but do not see further than their noses...

Some have sight yet choose to see only a fragment of the truth and love of Christ.

And some there are who have no physical sight yet who see brilliantly.

The light of Christ Jesus be with you all.

***And also with you.***

One thing we know for sure,

***once we were blind but now we can see***

**Prayer**

Loving God, you are majestic beyond all other light and beauty and power, yet you are more intimate than all other friendship and love. By the strength of Christ, please lift us high above common wants and expectations, into the light and power of your Presence. Lead us to wonder, and from wonder to love, and from love to that worship that only lovers can offer. In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Amen!*

**Hymn**

**Prayer of confession**

We make our confession, not to plead for mercy like beggars, but as God’s own children who need to level with themselves and, like the prodigal son, return home to the open arms of the One who loves us beyond all measuring.

Let us pray.

***God of glory and God of grace, bring us to our senses. If that means shining your light fiercely until our inner eyes hurt, and until our negligence and wilfulness stand exposed in their ugliness, then so be it.***

***We do not look for an easy way home but the hard way of truth and healing. Slowly but surely we come to you. In your arms may we find the grace to let go, to accept your forgiveness and receive restoration.***

***This we pray in the name of Christ Jesus our Saviour.***

***Amen!***

**Word of assurance**

My friends, there are no half measures in God. The cross is an everlasting testament to a Lover who goes all the way for our salvation. Step free for the past and turn to the future with keen expectation. You are a forgiven people.

*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 23** *© B.D. Prewer 2001*

You, God, are my best Friend,

I shall never be helpless.

***You make me rest in green places,***

***you lead me beside tranquil pools.***

***You revive my spirits.***

***You lead me along good paths***

***where your name is honoured.***

Even when I must walk

***through darkness and grief,***

***I will not be afraid.***

***For you are with me;***

***your grace and truth comfort me.***

You have set a table for me

in the presence of my doubts and fears.

***You massage my tense head and neck,***

***my cup is full and running over.***

Certainly goodness and mercy

shall follow me every day of my life,

***and I shall live in your own place***

***when calendars and clocks are no more.***

**Epistle or Old Testament/alternate reading: 1 Samuel 16:1 – 13 or Ephesians 5:8 – 14**

**Gospel reading: John 9:1 – 41**

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

(Hymn)

**Prayers for others**

**Sharing of concerns**

**Sharing of notices**

**Prayers**

Let us bring before the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the faces we know well, those we know a little, those on whom we have passed hasty judgement, and faces to whom we cannot put a name. And let us seek God’s blessing on all.

The kindly faces who have loved and nurtured us; family, friends, neighbours and workmates, those on earth and those in heaven.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,

***And may we all see your glory***

The faces of opponents who have mocked us or shunned us, abused us or betrayed us, exploited or ignored us.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,

***And may we all see your glory.***

The TV faces of hungry children overseas, or street kids in our cities, or aboriginal children

living in squalor.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,

***And may we all see your glory.***

The faces of our elected politicians, State and Federal, Government and Opposition, minor parties and independents.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,

***And may we all see your glory.***

The glossy magazine faces of sporting idols and film stars, royalty and fashion models, and the newspaper faces of those who have fallen into public shame.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,

***And may we all see your glory.***

The faces of those whom we have ignored or injured, or who have been the target of our superficial judgement or gossip.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,

***And may we all see your glory.***

The faces of those within this church who have been an inspiration to us, and those who more often get under our skin and annoy us.

Give them and us good sight, loving God,

***And may we all see your glory.***

Loving God, these are all your children, cherished with a priceless love. Through each of them, and through your whole human family, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven Then indeed we shall be blest beyond anything we can as yet see or imagine. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

*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**

We are numbered among those whose eyes have been touched with the salve of Jesus Christ.

***Amen! Once we were blind but now we can see!***

See clearly and walk gently wherever you go this week.

***Look gladly on those who encourage and patiently on those who irritate.***

See light where others see gloom, and hope where many see defeat.

***Look upon weak souls with mercy and face the tough ones without fear.***

Travel calmly with the confidence of those who have caught glimpses of a great glory,

***in and through Christ Jesus our Saviour.***

The grace of your Brother Jesus will redeem you,

the love of your Eternal Father will undergird you,

and the friendship of your Sisterly Spirit will empower you.

***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 allowing 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 23

Gospel reading: John 9:1 – 41

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/)*):*

Suggestions for the use of the psalm in worship:

Words from the psalm can be used in the **assurance of forgiveness** after confession and in the people’s response:

     Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,   
     and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.   
     Here, then, Christ’s word of blessing, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’

In this season of Lent a response by the congregation to the **declaration of forgiveness** may be appropriate. Hence, after the declaration the people might respond (after v. 3):

***he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.***

If the service includes the Lord’s Supper, or Eucharist, the **prayer of approach** before the Supper might include imagery from Psalm 23 (v. 5):

     You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;   
     you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.   
     Be present, risen Lord Jesus,   
     as you were with your disciples,   
     and make yourself known to us   
     in the breaking of the bread;   
     for you live and reign with the Father   
     and the Holy Spirit,   
     one God, for ever and ever. Amen   
                                     [also based on the walk to Emmaus in Luke 24]

*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*](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**

TIS 10/AHB 16 The Lord’s my shepherd

TIS 11/AHB 98 The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want

TIS 233/AHB 173 I will sing the wondrous story

TIS 256 From heaven you came, helpless babe (The Servant King)  
TIS 650 Brother, sister let me serve you

TIS 681 Lord, let me see

TIS 659 The Lord is my shepherd

TIS 145/AHB 81 The king of love my shepherd is

TIS 675 Shine Jesus Shine

ATW 435/NCYC 1999 Wellsprings *(a beautiful song. See Rev Peter for the music or do a YouTube search. Can be used as a congregational song or a listening song.)*

TIS 685 Lord, I come to you

TIS 549/AHB 456 God be in my head

TIS 136/AHB 72 There's a wideness in God's mercy

TIS 246/AHB 191 Christ is the world's light, he and none other

TIS 90/AHB 44 I'll praise my Maker while I've breath

ATO 313/AOV[2]3/various Christ be our light

TIS 725 In our darkness

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/lenta4.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 2 listening songs you could use. The first is, **Looking on the Outside**, y the Allies on their album, *Shoulder to Shoulder*. This song goes very well with the 1 Samuel reading and is based on the verse about God looking at our hearts more than anything else. The second is, **Into You**, by Jennifer Knapp on her album *Lay It Down*. This also goes very well with the Samuel reading.
* Ann suggests lots of other great stuff this week. She has a meditation by Rev Rose Broadstock, a quote from Paul Tillich, an activity for during the offering and a response activity. Have a look at them. They are well worth considering.
* Jeff Shrowder suggests re 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and John 9:1-41:  
  *Continue using the purple cloth from last week. It could be hung as a large plain banner or draped in a manner appropriate for your worship space. Place a small glass jug of water, a small pile of dirt and a small jug of oil on the worship/communion table: oil of anointing, water and soil for the mud of healing.  
  The gospel reading is quite long, but the numerous characters in it offer the opportunity for it to be presented in a dramatised form.*
* Farming and pastoral images, using light and darkness through the service, meditation and silence could all be used during this service.
* 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/>.