**WORSHIP 3-5 JULY – PENTECOST 14A (PROPER 9A)**

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/tH151bpTCUQ>. 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**

Let’s worship God!

Jesus says to us: Come to me, all of you that are weary,”

And God says, “Be still and know that I am God.”

***(sing) “Be still and know that I am God.”***

Jesus says: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;”

And God says, “Be still and know that I am God.”

***(sing) “Be still and know that I am God.”***

Jesus says: “for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls,”

And God says, “Be still and know that I am God.”

***(sing) “Be still and know that I am God.”***

Jesus says: “for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

And God says, “Be still and know that I am God.”

***(sing) “Be still and know that I am God.”***

**OPENING PRAYER:**

God we thank you for the gift of this day

As we step into the space you have created in our week

Space to wonder and reflect

Space to listen and love

Space to breathe and be

To be reminded that each day

Is alive with potential

God we thank you for the gift of this moment

As we step into the space you create in our day

Space to let go of our burdens

Space to escape our fears

Space to find our true selves

To be reminded that each moment

Is alive with potential

God we thank you for the gift of your presence

As we step into the spaciousness you create in our lives

Space to be filled with awe

Space to be filled with wonder

Space to be filled with delight

To be reminded that each life

Finds its potential in You.

God of all time and all space,

We open our lives

To your love and grace

Amen

**CONFESSION Romans 7: 15-25a** *©2002 Nathan Nettleton LaughingBird.net*

Can you relate to these words of Paul…

Sometimes I can’t make head nor tail of my own behaviour. I want to do what is right, but instead I find myself doing things I absolutely despise. Even as I do them, I am telling myself I don’t want to.

Clearly then I know they are wrong, so I am not trying to excuse myself by arguing that the law is stupid. The fact is that I don’t have what it takes to control everything I do. Somewhere inside me, sin has corrupted the system. When I look inside myself and see the selfish desires that live there, I know they are all rotten to the core.

While I have no trouble making up my mind to do what is right, I still can’t do it. I fail to follow through on my good intentions, and instead find myself doing something crooked — the exact thing I wanted so much to avoid. Now if what I actually do is not what I am intending to do, then clearly I have lost control of what I am doing. Something inside me — namely sin — is sabotaging the system and wreaking havoc.  
So, in my experience it seems to be an inescapable fact of life that when I intend to do what is good, corruption is lying in wait, ready to sneak under my guard. God’s instructions on how we should live appeal to me greatly. I love them with all my heart and mind.

So the various parts of me are receiving the right instructions from my mind, but I experience another set of instructions trying to override them. I can see that my body is being controlled by a crippling addiction to sin.

How completely and utterly screwed up I am! Is there anybody who can set me free from the addiction that has such a deadly grip on my body?

**FORGIVENESS**

Thank God there is! Jesus the Messiah, our Lord, can set us free!

***Thanks be to God!***

**OUR READINGS FOR TODAY:** Take a moment to read our other readings for today, Genesis 24:34-67, Psalm 45 (or Song of Solomon 2:8-13), Romans 7:15-25, Matthew 11:16-30

**REFLECTION** *by Rev Peter Cannon*

I love conducting weddings. It is like the delight and warmth of the young couple just flows off them onto those around. Moving in the wash of such joy, hope and love is a blessing which stays with me for a long time.

Our reading from Genesis of the arranging of the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah is anything but like a contemporary marriage. It is done within a patriarchal system, marriages are transactions for the continuation and building of the family economy. Love has little to do with it, normally.

Yet here, respect for the woman, her wishes and needs pervade the story. Rebekah choses. She is shown honour and we are told that Isaac loved her. This was not the basis of the arrangement but an expression of their life together. Love and respect are characteristics of this story set in a business arrangement.

What a contrast our Gospel and Epistle readings. Both are set in conflict. The Epistle explores an internal moral and psychological conflict of aspiration and self-perception. Paul admits to acting like a person he does not want to be. The Gospel is set in the conflict of external expectations others place on Jesus initially but the disciples generally. The tension between setting high standards but being a “wowser”/”goody-two-shoes” and on the other appearing to be lax and of low moral standards, leading others astray.

Some little glimpses in each reading link them beautifully. Paul breathes a sigh of relief when he declares the answer is found in Jesus. In last week’s reading, Paul spoke of freedom, not to do as we like but to live in love. Matthew points a new way in Jesus that is surprising. Verse 19 speaks of wisdom showing forth in action. Then in v25 that wisdom is available from places not expected, even from children and the unlearned. It is a wisdom that helps carry burdens in Jesus on a new path that is life-giving.

A new path. A wisdom that is based in a freedom to love. The question is not if the rules are being obeyed but am I loving the other. As with the young couple who freely give up their “free” single life, the love that binds them actually is life-giving.

And so back to a new phase of Covid-19 lock downs. The questions are how can I look after you and how can I look after my neighbour? Your wellbeing is my concern. Your neighbour’s wellbeing is your concern. These questions take us beyond the moment and the rules to what is life-giving. Such a positive approach will also help us find creative and responsible ways to stay well and hold each other in love.

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

The Covid “sabbatical” invites us to take stock of the way we live life. Some have encouraged us to not go back to the way we were but instead to use this time to learn and be wise.

1. What then gives you life and joy in this time of restrictiveness?
2. What burdens you at this time?
3. What is life-giving for you in your relationship with Christ at this time of lockdown and as we move into a new future?
4. How can you bless others with love and joy while lovingly keeping them safe?

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS**

You are invited to pause and walk through the space where you are.

Wander from room to room, allowing your eyes to scan the room and the surfaces.

You might like to bring back to the worship 3 or more symbolic items of:

* something that is a burden for the world
* something that is a burden for someone you know, or someone in your community
* something that is a burden for you

*Pause to reflect*

You are invited to pray silently for a moment or two with your symbols,

* for the burdens of the world
* for the burdens of friends and family, those close to us and our community
* for the burdens that we bear ourselves

***Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen***

**SONG: “REBEKAH’S SONG”**

*a song by Ps Annette Buckley and Rev Linda Young is played on our video. The words for today are below.*

Rebekah, child of God,

Intriguing matriarch

Her life unfolds in tales, like ours,

both light and dark.

A woman of her time,

a woman of her place,

Responding to God’s call to mother

Isaac’s race.

A woman at a well,

a stranger coming by,

requests a drink, and she runs quickly

to comply.

Her life, forever changed

through hospitality;

she boldly enters God’s new life

and family.

God’s children, too are we

and like Rebekah’s tale

our stories, intertwined with God’s,

we soar and fail;

as people of our time,

as people of our place,

responding to the call we hear

to share God’s grace.

**BLESSING**

So go out into the time given to you in the coming days

In the spaces that call you to life

Live as Rebekah did:

With hospitality and courage

Live as Paul did

With self-awareness and humility

Live as Jesus did

As a bringer of hope and light to the weary and burdened

And the Holy Three-in-One, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer

Be with you and guide you and bring you peace.

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.*