**Worship liturgy for Easter 4a Macedon Ranges Partnership**

***Weekend of 2nd - 3rd May 2020***

And so we continue on our Easter Resurrection journey, encountering the Risen one who offers abundant life for all. This invitation brings healing, reassurance, and comfort and a new way of living that reminds us of our connection to each other. Justice, compassion, generosity and joy flow from the new community in Christ.

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/wxGhIASf99o.

Our service invites you to read the scriptures, pause, meditate and pray. Allow the stories told there to lead you. Our readings are: Acts 2:42-47, Psalm 23, 1 Peter 2:19-25 and John 10:1-10. We suggest reading the relevant passages prior to the specific prayers and litanies. We are touching on all the scripture readings in one way or another this week.

In preparation for the Prayers for Others, you might like to gather some of these ‘woolly’ things (it doesn’t matter if they’re not real wool): a blanket, a piece of fleece or cotton wool (from your Pastoral Care kit, if you have one!), some woolly socks or moccies, some knitting, crochet or weaving.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**:

The gate opens, and beckons us in…

the path lies beyond, and carries us forward,

The community awaits.

Unable to gather around the Table,

We gather, instead, around the Stories of the Table,

and feast together in celebration and worship.

Come and be restored

Come and be reminded

Come and be remade

Come, for all is prepared…

**A PRAYER: Divine care**

*after Psalm 23* by *Rev.Dr. Sarah Agnew, http://praythestory.blogspot.com/2017/04/divine-care.html*

All is ready,
the Divine host has prepared
for all our needs.

Still places, thin places,
where waters flow,
wildflowers show off
the bounty, beauty
of creation: souls
restored, minds cleared,
bodies rested. The Divine
has taken such good care.

Even in the dark places,
the harsh places, where
rain does not fall, where
soil cracks deep and
thirsty, Divine Comfort is,
even there: stars pierce
the night, angels’ flight
sends a breeze to ease
the mind, give body breath,
soul rest; to clear a path
of humility, of kindness.
The Divine has taken
such good care.

A home awaits, feast is laid,
cups ever full, love overflowing,
mercy, goodness, showered
like oil anointing each day
of life, and here I’ll stay,
in this house the Divine
has made ready for us,
the beloved, Divinely loved.

Abundance

**CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF GRACE** *inspired by 1 Peter 2:19-25*

Holy God

When we want to repay evil with evil

**Help us to live out of your abundant grace**

When we try to hide our true selves

**Help us to live into your abundant grace**

When we feel cornered and want to lash out at others

**Help us to live out of your abundant grace**

When we wander from your path of justice and compassion

**Help us to live into your abundant grace**

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE** 1 Peter 2:24-25 (Laughingbird)

He copped the consequences of our corruption
in his own body on the cross,
so that we could walk free with a clean slate
and dedicate our lives to doing what is right.
When he was wounded,
we were healed.
Before that we were as far off track
as a penguin in the desert,
but now we are back where we belong,
in the care of the one who protects and guides us.

**SOME QUESTIONS TO PONDER** *around our readings*

1.       Consider our passages. What dominant themes and issues connect them?

2.       The beautiful images of God being our shepherd who cares and looks out for our wellbeing and Jesus taking this further in John’s Gospel of being the “good shepherd” leading us into abundant life have comforted and encouraged people during times of grief, struggle and pain for generations. Without falling into clichés, how does this compare to the abundance portrayed in the Acts passage?

3.       How do we ground and live this life in a Covid-19 and post-Covid era?

**REFLECTION**

Abundant life….a theme that runs through our readings this week. What does it mean to have abundant life, or to live life abundantly?

This last week, and a little longer, I have had a sore back. I’m not used to being unwell, and I don’t like the limitations it has placed on me. I have been grumpy, especially frustrated because the last couple of weeks were meant to be ones where I at least felt like I had my head above water after the busyness of learning how to do church in a new way, with new technology, all in the week or so leading up to Easter. I was meant to be living abundantly…getting ahead, maybe even finding opportunities for learning new things in a more organised way. But my sore back doesn’t make me feel like learning anything, I just wanted to bunker down and feel sorry for myself.

In the midst of this, a message came from my dear friend on the other side of the world. Her story is not mine to tell, but one of the worst tragedies a family could imagine had happened, was in the midst of happening, to her family. As I walked through the week with her, so far away, so helpless, I was amazed at her capacity to find grace in her circumstances. She asked if I had an image I could share that might help her, and I immediately thought of a painting I had seen created at a gathering I attended last year. The artist is both a gifted artist and a passionate theologian, and I wrote, explained the circumstances and asked if I could have a copy of the image for my friend. “Of course,” she replied “and here are 3 others on the same theme that I’ve been working on since then.” Abundant love, shared by an almost stranger, for my grieving friend.

My friend put some words together for her loved ones, and sent them to me to read. They were vulnerable and fierce, plaintive and hope-filled, raw in their honesty and touching in their search for meaning and comfort. The little family gathered as best they could, their Christian and Jewish faiths holding them and providing stepping stones through the bewildering fog of despair.

Sometimes, our best selves show up when they are most needed. We can recognise the abundance of God from the deepest pit, but miss it when we’re inconvenienced by what are relatively minor incidents. Our current way of being, muddling through these days, is probably somewhere in between those two extremes. Where can we find the abundance of God in the midst of our lives at the moment? How can we find the strength to begin to look for it? How can we live abundantly for the sake of ourselves and our communities this week?

**SOME MUSIC FOR MEDITATION**

*If you have one close to hand, you may like to pause and listen to one of the many songs inspired by and written from Psalm 23 as you reflect and pray.*

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS – A ‘SHEEP-ISH ‘PRAYER**

*You might like to wrap a blanket around you as we pray for:*

Those around the world who are without shelter today

Those around the world who are without someone to care for them today

Those who are grieving, especially the friends and families of

Leading Senior Constable Lynette Taylor,

Constable Glen Humphris

Senior Constable Kevin King

Constable Josh Prestney

Janice Willis

Judith Adams and

Jan Hillgrove

And others you may know….

*You might like to hold your cushioning fleece or cotton wool, as we pray for:*

Those who are particularly affected by the difficulties of life at this time

Those who have lost jobs and livelihoods

Those who are working to care for people who are sick

And others you may know….

*You might like to have your feet in your socks or moccies, and wiggle your toes as we pray for:*

Warmth and solutions for those with nowhere to live

Guidance and rescue for those whose feet are on the wrong path

Strength and support for those who walk beside people who are suffering

And others you may know….

*You might like to knit, crochet or weave, creating something as we pray:*

For creative people who continue to bring us light and joy

For teachers and parents creating new ways of educating children

For all who live in hope of a new Creation

And others you may know….

and we say together the words Jesus taught us, in whichever language or version which is most life-giving for you:

The Lord’s Prayer

**SENDING OUT**

Let’s go into the coming week:

**Blessed by the One who gently leads us**

Following the voice of the One who faithfully calls us

**Empowered by the Spirit of the One who delights in us**

into freedom and restoration

**into generosity and community**

into vibrant, abundant, everlasting

**LIFE!!!**

**Amen**