

Shepparton Uniting Church
Worship Service, April 11th 2021.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY.

“We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather today
and pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging.”

INTROIT TIS 771 Now to him who loved us.....

CALL TO WORSHIP.

Heavenly Father we gather as your people here today in this place.

Bless us as we come together to worship you.

Holy God may our hearts be open to hear your word.

Bless us as we come together to worship you.

Gracious Lord may we know your presence among us.

Bless us as we come together to worship you. Amen.

HYMN TIS 100. All creatures of our God & King.....

WELCOME

PRAYERS OF ADORATION & CONFESSION.

Eternal God, we lift up our hearts and praise you for the unlimited power of your love in Jesus Christ.

We thank you, we praise you, because he never stopped loving you even when his disciples ran away and death starred him in the face.

Because he never stopped loving other people even when he was being nailed to the cross.

Because the worst that men could do in sending Jesus out to die could not stand in the way of your love.

Because you showed us the power of your love in raising him from death.

Because of his dying and rising again we know that your love is strong enough to go on loving ‘til the end of time.

Eternal God, we praise you because we know your love must win in the end.

Our Confession.

Risen Lord, we have betrayed you by following our own way

We have denied you by fearing to follow yours.

And we forget how blessed we are with all the gifts of creation.

Lord we are lost. Let your forgiveness find us.

Hold us in your strong arms and give us your new life.

Live in us and with us each day and together we may make a world that is new. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE. God loves us and cares for us. His Son, the risen Christ has died for us that we might have eternal life. Let us live in joy, love and gratitude.

Praise be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

EARLY WORD

HYMN TIS 693. Come as you are.....

BIBLE READINGS: Acts 4:32-35 & John: 20:19-31

REFLECTION.

In the early morning, on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene visited the tomb where Jesus' crucified body had been laid to rest 3 days earlier. And as we know, she found the stone had been rolled to one side and two angels were sitting where Jesus had been lying. Distraught, (as you can imagine) she did not take in what the angel's message of the risen Lord meant and fled the tomb, only then to come face to face with, as she supposed the gardener, but then on hearing his voice realised it was Jesus.

Can you imagine the turmoil in Mary's mind? First the absolute grief at Jesus death, the fear and shock of finding the empty tomb, then hesitation, some doubt perhaps and then sheer joy as she realised that Jesus had truly been raised from the dead! It would be one big roller coaster of emotions, wouldn't it? Jesus is alive! Jesus is alive!

And then Jesus message to her, to go & tell the disciples that he is alive and he will go on ahead & meet them in Galilee.

I doubt very much that Mary would have taken a leisurely stroll that Easter morning! With all that pent up emotion & jubilation she would have taken the shortest route and the fastest speed she could muster to rush in and tell the disciples that, "I have seen the Lord." "He is alive!"

The disciples didn't really believe Mary. They were too afraid of the Jewish authorities and what they may do to them, so for the disciples it is was better to stay hidden behind closed doors.

Later in the day Jesus appeared to the 10 disciples, and as Mary had been, they too were over joyed to see Jesus alive.

Thomas was missing! We don't know why! Perhaps he wanted to be by himself to sort out what was in his mind; perhaps he went to buy food for the group. He just wasn't there when the risen Jesus appeared.

And when Thomas did return he made it quite plain that he wouldn't believe until he saw for himself the wounds in the hands & the feet of Jesus.

Thomas needed to see for himself before he could comprehend the truth!

How many times might we have said, No I don't believe it!!!! I wouldn't believe that unless I saw it! Or.... relating a rather spectacular incident to friends and finishing by saying, "I wouldn't have believed that if I hadn't actually seen it myself!

We can identify with that can't we?

We live with doubt all the time. And doubt is not necessarily a bad thing. It's important to question things we don't understand, situations we don't comprehend or have reservations about. Because, in our doubt, and in our questioning, we learn more, we do some research, we understand more, we come to decisions that satisfy us; and hopefully those decisions we make are right for us, our families, our work, our leisure, our communities. If we didn't doubt some things we would probably go headlong into many disasters so.....doubt can be a good thing. Doubt can help us look at things differently and perhaps come up with a better solution or see a new thing more clearly.

Having said that doubt can be a good thing, sometimes our lives can be strangled by "fearful doubt." Fearful doubt can stop us from taking up an opportunity because we doubt, fearful doubt can cause us to live our lives with excuses and we never get to be fulfilled.

So what does it take for a person to believe in the risen Christ? We have the ways of believing that are in today's Gospel.

The truth that comes out of the Gospel reading is the truth that the risen Christ has compassion upon his believing/disbelieving disciples. Jesus does not simply rise from the dead. He returns to his fearful disciples. He goes back to Galilee, back to those whom he called, back to those who left when the

going was too tough, back to those with whom he had spent his ministry, back to those who are afraid of what will happen next. Jesus returned to his disciples.

Jesus didn't rebuke Thomas for his demand to see him and to see the wounds in order to believe. Thomas came to his belief in his way- that is to see for himself the risen Lord.

For us we meet Jesus through hearing the Gospel stories, through prayer, through sharing together and encountering the risen Christ in our lives by how we feel- through the burning feeling in our middles and the joy in our hearts as we open ourselves to his message and to his call in our lives. Jesus offers us what we need in order to believe. Jesus returns to us, over and over, and always, no matter what!

This is the joy.

When Jesus visited the disciples on that first day of the week there was no more doubt. When Thomas saw Jesus wounds there was no more doubt, but total belief and exclamation- "My Lord and my God." Out of love, Jesus gave Thomas what he needed – tangible proof.

So for us it is "faith" in the risen Lord. Maybe a faithful doubt perhaps! Faithful doubt is ok. Faithful doubt can lead us to more learning, more opening up of our minds and hearts, more sharing, more desire to have the risen Jesus in our lives.

We also have tangible proof that Jesus is alive. Whilst we believe that God can be found everywhere, at any place, we do need some place. To touch, to see & to believe we can gather in a place. Whilst the building is not so important it is the meeting place, somewhere to go, somewhere to go and know that God is tangibly, visibly really there. We meet in the Church. We meet other people, living, breathing embodiments of faith. People who gather to worship, to witness to the living Christ in the living of the daily lives, which is a force in the world, a force for good. God. For us seeing has been believing.

The Eucharist- the highlight of our worship, that mystery we enter into each communion Sunday which gives us the physical, tangible reassurance we need. Our God meets us in the bread & wine. Jesus meets us at the table, in the stuff of ordinary life.

Here we have us, with all our doubts, all our questions, and all our hesitations; we come to the table and taste, touch, see, and believe once again. As he ministered to Thomas, Jesus ministers to us, and continues to minister- to us. Despite our doubts Jesus continues to walk with us, and continues to minister to us.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, when you rose from the dead at Easter, you defeated sin, suffering and death. You triumphed over the forces of evil and destruction and you came back to us. You did not just rise to new life; you returned to your disciples. Even those who betrayed you and in your hour of need deserted you, you returned, gave peace, offered forgiveness and reassuring touch.

We have doubts, as they had doubts. We have fears, as they had fears. We have a yearning to be with you, as they yearned.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come to us in body and blood. Stay with us, even when we fail to stay with you. Return to us as you returned to them. In your love, return to us so that we might return to you. Amen.

HYMN: TiS 607 Make me a channel of your peace....

OFFERING & DEDICATION: Loving Lord, we bring our gifts and ourselves to you this day. Bless us and the gifts we bring, that they may be used to the greater good for all, and in your service. Amen.

NOTICES OF JOYS & CONCERNS

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION.

Jesus wounded & risen, we bring to you our prayers for your broken world. We pray for your people in places of war and unrest; in places of ecological disaster such as the floods in Indonesia, in places of famine, and in places where the pandemic is out of control & corrupt governments are neglecting their peoples.

Wounded Creator, we have seen your crucified and risen love;

Work your resurrection in the lives of your people.

We bring our prayers for your divided church, and we pray for places where wars are raged and your people are left desolate, where ancient hatreds have not been healed by your gospel, and your church is split by faction.

Wounded Redeemer, we have seen your crucified and risen love;

Work your resurrection in the lives of your people.

We bring our prayers for our fractured community, and we pray for those pierced by nails of prejudice and hatred, of neglect and abuse, of indifference and rejection.

Wounded Lover, we have seen your crucified and risen love,

Work your resurrection in the lives of your people.

We bring our prayers for all who are suffering in the pain of injury, illness, confusion, grief, loneliness, hunger, homelessness and with no sense of a future.

Wounded Healer, we have seen your crucified and risen love;

Work your resurrection in the lives of your people.

We bring our prayers for all who have died, those who have been witnesses to your love in our communities, and for those who have never seen or believed.

We give thanks for Thomas and all your saints who have known you as the risen Christ.

May we too, recognise you in our midst, that with all your saints we may come to the fullness of joy in your presence.

Jesus, wounded and risen, we have seen your crucified and risen love;

Work your resurrection in the lives of your people. Amen.

HYMN: TiS 210 O for a thousand tongues to sing.....

BLESSING: May we go into the week with love and joy in our hearts. May we be filled with gratitude for all that we have, and all that we share.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.

RECESSIONAL HYMN: TiS 779.

“May the feet of God walk with you, and his hand hold you tight.

May the eye of God rest on you, and his ear hear your cry.

May the smile of God be for you, and his breath give you life.

May the child of God grow in you, and his love bring you home.”