

Order of service Date: Sunday July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Pentecost 8A

We acknowledge that we are worshipping on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung people, of the Kulin nation, and pay our respects to elders past and present.

# DON'T FORGET YOU CAN LOG INTO THE CHURCH WEBSITE AND SEE MUCH OF THIS BY VIDEO ON THE FRONT PAGE!!!!!

**INTROIT** – Pebbles. (This song connects our images of stones last week to this week and the idea that small things have an effect too.)

1.One little pebble and the circles begin,Circle in a circle they go on without end.Ripples on the water move across the pond,The pebble disappears but the circles move along.

Circles on water from one little stone. The water is smooth if you leave it alone. Each pebble you toss makes a difference you see, The ripples that circle can touch you and me.

2.Pebbles of good, pebbles of bad,Circles of happiness and circles of sad.No way to stop them once they begin,Stop and think a minute, then drop your pebbles in.

Circles on water from one little stone. The water is smooth if you leave it alone. Each pebble you toss makes a difference you see, The ripples that circle can touch you and me.

# CALL TO WORSHIP

One: As we gather to worship, we thank you God.All: We thank you for the many blessings of our lives.One: We raise our voices in praise, remembering your wonderful works in our lives.

All: In line with our ancestors in faith, with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, Rebekah, Rachel, Naomi and Ruth, we praise you for the opportunities we have known.

**One:** For the work we are able to get; for the doors that are opened to us; **All: for the privileges in life.** 

**One:** For all the ways you have been our provider and defender, we praise you.

All: Be with us as we worship, and hear our voices, lifted in praise. Hear us, see us, be with us, and bless us as we worship and in our lives. One: Let us worship God.

**Sing** – TIS 110 (To TIS 479) 1 Sing praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation, the God of power, the God of love,

the God of our salvation; with healing balm my soul he fills, and every grief he gently stills: to God all praise and glory!

# 2

What God's almighty power has made that will he ever cherish, and will, unfailing, soon and late, with lovingkindness nourish; and where he rules in kingly might there all is just and all is right:

to God all praise and glory!

The Lord is never far away, but, through all grief distressing an ever-present help and stay, our peace, and joy, and blessing; as with a mother's tender hand he leads his own, his chosen band: to God all praise and glory!

## 4

Come, you that name Christ's holy name, give God all praise and glory; and all who own his power, proclaim aloud the wondrous story. Cast each false idol from its throne, the Lord is God, and he alone: to God all praise and glory!

## 5

So come before his countenance and leap in exultation; now gladly pay your due of praise in joyful celebration.

Take courage in the Lord, my heart; refreshed in him, play your full part: to God all praise and glory!

# WELCOME

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

# And also with you!

## **Opening prayer**

Loving God, we praise you for the opportunity to gather in worship.

Open our hearts as we bring ourselves before you in humble desire to follow your ways and know your wisdom.

Open our eyes and help us see how our lives impact others and this created world. Open our ears and help us to hear the voices of those who have been silenced for too long.

Open our minds and help us to understand our impact on the world and our more rightful place in it.

Show us your glory, and guide our thoughts and reflections as we worship, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Prayer of confession**

**One:** Holy Creator, we have not always been aware of our privilege and power. We are a people of inequity and injustice.

All: We have not always understood the impact of silencing on others.

**One:** We are a people who have known and taken for granted ways and laws that disempower and dismiss.

All: We have not always been careful of those who have less opportunity in our world.

**One:** We are a people with a voice, yet we have not always spoken the truth.

All: Gracious Creator, we are also aware that we have hurt our own lives and spirits by the actions and inactions we have justified through our privilege.

**One:** We have not understood the value of the diversity with which we have been created.

All: Forgive us and teach us to notice the invisible, to value the commodified, and to hear the voices of the silenced.

**One:** Forgive us and teach us to move out of the way and make room in our lives for the "other."

All: Show us how to truly be your people, we pray. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

# Words of affirmation

The greatest assurance we have is our inherent diversity.

Our call is to honour, celebrate, enhance, and listen to the

glory of all of who we are. God has done this for us. Let us praise God by doing so for one another. Here again the Good News:

Your sins are forgiven.

# ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

## EARLY WORD – "Star Girl, flowers and tiny seeds."

Welcome the kids and parents.

If there are any children present, ask how they are going.

Firstly, I want to say that I hope this first back doing remote learning has been ok for you all. I know it is difficult doing this. Try and remember that this is a good thing we are doing to try and stop the spread of this tricky virus.

Well enough of that for now.

Today I am going to show you a clip.

How unusual for you Scott I hear you say...ha ha very funny.

Anyway, the clip is from a film I watched recently over the school holidays. It was on Disney plus and we had a free 14 day trial which I readily took advantage of (well you know, school holidays!) After this I cancelled it. My youngest son was not impressed.

Ok let's move on.

The film is called Star Girl, and featured a 16 year old teenage girl called Grace Vanderwaal. I first saw Grace at 12 years old when she auditioned for America's Got Talent. She sang an original song and played ukulele. She went on to win. Since then her music career has skyrocketed. When I saw she was in this film I thought I would have a look to see how she went at the acting thing.

She did well. It was a pretty sweet film. In the film she plays Star Girl. She arrives at a local high school after years of home schooling, and really shakes things up with her music by inspiring pretty much everyone from the football team to the debate team.

She wins the school debating competition and is entered in the state finals, which by the way she wins.

The clip I am showing is of her speech in the final.

Now some instructions.

If you have the order of service with the media elements embedded in the order, just click on it below and play it.

If however you don't, I draw your attention to the link below on our web page. But it is two links. I couldn't find her speech all in one clip. So, make sure you look at part 1 first, then part 2.

Then come back to me. See you in a minute.

...

Welcome back, I hope you liked her speech.

The reason I showed it this morning is that it rang some bells for me in regard to the gospel reading today.

In the reading Jesus is giving another parable to the crowd of people listening. In fact, more than just one. But in them he is talking about how small things become bigger and become noticed and valuable.

What I liked about Star Girl's speech is the idea of needing to wait while the flower grows, before it becomes the flower you see and love.

It isn't said in today's parables, but the idea is there also, especially with the mustard seed parable. You have to wait for the seed after being planted, to gradually grow, to become the thing that will give others joy.

We need to keep in mind this is a story helping us think about God's kingdom, or what it will be like when God is recognised by everyone and sees God's worth, and the worth of all the good things Jesus speaks about.

And it is saying it starts small, and we have to wait. Along the way we will see bits of it, and then one day, we will see something big happen.

Waiting is something many of us do not like to do. But this story, and Star Girl's speech suggest that it is really important to learn. Especially in this Covid world. Wait patiently. Stay safe. Wash your hands. And now...wear a mask. Now for another song.

It is a cool song called, "The Seed Song". You can listen to it from your order of service or check out the link below. It is a repeat after me song. You will get the idea.

Sing well. And until then, see you next week. Bye.

## SING: The Seed Song

Find a little seed, (find a little seed)
 Plant it in the ground, (plant it in the ground)
 Wait for it to grow, (Wait for it to grow)
 Don't disturb it.
 Don't expect to see, (don't expect to see)
 Changes over night, (Changes overnight)
 If you wait a while, (if you wait a while)
 You'll find new life.

CHORUS: Sunshine will come, Raindrops will fall, Your little seed will grow again. Soon there will be a day in spring when Your seed blossoms and grows.

2. Find a seed of love, (find a seed of love)
Plant it where you can, (plant it where you can)
Wait for it to grow, (wait for it to grow)
Don't disturb it.
Don't expect to see, (don't expect to see)
Changes over night, (Changes overnight)
If you wait a while, (if you wait a while)
You'll find new life.

CHORUS: Sunshine will come, Raindrops will fall, Your little seed will grow again. Soon there will be a day in spring when Your seed blossoms and grows.

Sunshine will come, Raindrops will fall, Your little seed will grow again. Soon there will be a day in spring when Your seed blossoms and grows. And that's that!

## SHARING OUR STORIES - Presence

## **READINGS:**

#### Genesis 29:15-28

<sup>15</sup>Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" <sup>16</sup>Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup>Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. <sup>18</sup>Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." <sup>19</sup>Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." <sup>20</sup>So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. <sup>21</sup>Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." <sup>22</sup>So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. <sup>23</sup>But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. <sup>24</sup>(Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) <sup>25</sup>When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" <sup>26</sup>Laban said, "This is not done in our country-giving the younger before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup>Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." <sup>28</sup>Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

#### Matthew 13:31-35, 44-52

<sup>31</sup>He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup>it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." <sup>33</sup>He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." <sup>34</sup>Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing.

<sup>35</sup>This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world."

<sup>44</sup>"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. <sup>45</sup>"Again,

the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup>on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. <sup>47</sup>"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup>when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup>So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>51</sup>"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." <sup>52</sup>And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

## **PREACHING –** Subversive Silence

For those of you at Beaumaris Uniting Church (you notice I say this expecting there will be others listening in...or hoping...),anyway you may recall at the start of 2019 I enthralled, or was it bored, you with a presentation on my life to that point, in order to help you get to know me.

You may recall that I mentioned I did my secondary schooling at Ringwood Technical School.

I enjoyed going there. Made good friends. But it is fair to say that it was different to friends who went to the high school.

My point is that I learnt different things, and things differently to those of my friends who attended a high school.

One such area was English.

Without going into a whole spiel let me simply say that I never learnt certain grammatical aspects of English well, nor did I learn certain devices of the English language well. Some of these I picked up later, and I am sure there are things that I have still not learnt.

In fact this was to be a major nemesis when I did New Testament

Greek...twice...while training for the ministry. Curse you New Testament Greek. Anyway, one such matter is the difference between metaphor and simile, those devices used in writing to make comparison between things.

Metaphor takes the stance that something is something else – I walked out of the ocean a wet fish. Clearly, I was not, and am not a wet fish, but it was describing my state.

Simile takes the stance that one thing is like something else – she is like a rose. Clearly, she is not, but it is describing something about her that is reminiscent of a rose.

Which brings me to these parables of Jesus.

These are similes.

The kingdom of heaven is like...

But here is the thing about similes.

Similes are used to compare two unlike things with each other, as if they were alike. Now I hope I am not telling you how to suck eggs, but this is an important point in understanding these parables.

Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like -

mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;

yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened;

treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; a merchant in search of fine pearls;

a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind;

Clearly none of these things are the kingdom of heaven, and clearly none of them are at all like the kingdom of heaven, but that is what similes do right? But more than this is going on here.

Jesus is not only comparing unlike things, but he is comparing things that might well be considered offensive.

As Rev Professor Bill Loader puts it - There were more positive examples of plants which Jesus might have chosen. Instead he declares the kingdom of God is like what was often a weed!

I mean why not rather suggest the kingdom of heaven is like a cedar of Lebanon, and then you hear the crowds go, oooh, they're big, rather than, a mustard seed, ruddy things spread like weeds and overgrow all my other plants, and as for birds nesting in them, I don't think so.

And there is yeast, a fungus, in and of itself, potentially poisonous.

What is Jesus doing here, offering similes that are so unlike the kingdom as to be almost ridiculous?

That is exactly what he is doing.

Again Bill Loader offers this:

For example, it may not be only the smallness of the seed (storytellers' exaggeration to call it the smallest!), but also the weediness of the mustard plant which reflects on what many thought of Jesus and his preaching.

In this sense the parable has much in common with the absurdity of the sowing in the parable of the sower. It is a defiantly assertive Jesus who proclaims the coming of the kingdom, nevertheless! The cross will be absurd. This is definitely alternative in emphasis. It becomes a symbol of the way of discipleship, the lowliness blessed in the beatitudes... In the parable it now expresses the hope that the kingdom will also draw the birds, the Gentiles.

This little embellishment about the birds may already have had that significance in Jesus' use of the parable. In any case it connects us to the great vision of the kingdom as a gathering of all people in peace and reconciliation, foreshadowed in the eucharistic feast. It is a value which collides with the xenophobia which appears to be driving current approaches around our world to dispossessed peoples. (Loader)

But how absurd do we go with this thinking?

Do we go this far for example?

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who betrays and cheats his father and brother in order to gain his father's inheritance. He takes advantage of his brother's stupidity and his father's blindness.

Again, the kingdom of God is like this same man's uncle who deceives his nephew into marrying the daughter the nephew does not love in order that he will work for

years until the uncle allows him to marry his true love. And then make him work for years more.

Ok so this is the story of Jacob and his and his family's deceptions of each other. This extended family truly are the most despicable and dysfunctional group of people who will stop at nothing to pursue their own selfish ends.

So why do we need to hear this story, when God is not even present in the story? God is not a character in the story and yet the human characters, especially Jacob, are the recipients of his blessings and promises. Moreover, these characters do not really seem the sort of people we would expect God to mix with. And yet the story has a point to make precisely here.

These characters are all intent on using and subverting a system of conventional social and cultural arrangements for their own ends. In this sense, they echo the God behind the narrative, whose promise and blessing also subvert conventional social (and political) systems.

This week's scripture passages remind us that - silence can be a form of powerful resistance and subversion of imperial/patriarchal norms when the silence is grounded in the redemptive work of God's spirit.

Silence in the face of injustice is sometimes the prudent and only option. For example, the women in this story, Rebecca and Leah had little power or authority in a patriarchal world to overtly resist the dictates of their father Laban, no matter how unjust. Yet, silence is not the same as acceptance. The sisters remain free to act when the time feels right. Their subversive silence enables Rachel and Leah to play their part in God's unfolding story of freedom, liberation, and covenant.

## This is much like the parables of Jesus.

At the same time, we find God's purposes in the story inextricably bound to various human schemes, sometimes of questionable motive.

God's preference for the younger twin sets in motion the ribbon of deception that runs through the story. It is at times hard to disentangle God's purposes from the rather dubious, personally motivated human ones. But this is how we find God present with his people as we move on in the story of Genesis.

God's struggle against the corruption of the world (Genesis 6-9) and for the blessing of the families of the earth (12:3) is only worked out through deep involvement in, with, and against the course of human events, conventions and schemes. (Wallace) When I was in theological hall, our principal at the time, Rev Dr Ian Williams, introduced us to regulatory statements. These are statements that underpin everything we believe, say and live in our life of faith. He talked of one of his, which I have adopted as it says succinctly many things I would hold to, and it is this. God always acts with absolute respect for human freedom.

We see that present in this story. God does not attempt to manipulate the various characters to act out of character as it were. God does not seek to lead them away from the choices they make. They are free to be as deceptive as they choose. God lets this dynamic play out, in order that their actual freedom be respected and honoured.

This is the type of involvement and presence that will not only lead to the cross but will transform the world through it. (Wallace)

This is the kingdom of heaven vision.

I want to say one more thing about these parables, well, the parable of the mustard seed particularly.

As Bill Loader indicated, the emphasis is not really about something small becoming enormous. That is often how we have been led to understand this parable. Rather the parable, and Jesus intention, is to understand him seeing the kingdom as something that starts small in on place then gets bigger, enough to be noticed. To my mind then, this does not mean seeing it as a small start overtime growing into something so huge that it takes people's breath away who are within its sphere of influence.

Rather I see it as a small seed planted here, then growing into something a bit bigger, that can be recognised for what it is. Then in another place another seed is planted, and there it too grows big enough to be recognised. And this is repeated in many small locations all over the place, the country, world.

Let me show you how I picture it. Firstly, here is the usual way we see this parable.

## (Show slide of Victoria 1)



Here is Victoria. You can see a blue dot at Seymour, representing that small seed planted. (Might need a magnifier)

## (Show slide of Victoria 2)



Then it grows bigger.



# (Show slide of Victoria 3)

And bigger but stays in the same spot.

The way I am seeing this parable however is more like this.

# (Show slide of Victoria 4)



Again, we see the small seed in Seymour.



Then we see a couple more, Bendigo, Mount Buller.

## (Show slide of Victoria 6)



Then even more keep cropping up – Lakes Entrance, Hamilton, Geelong, Melbourne.

## (Show slide of Victoria 7)



But then something really interesting happens. Each of the seeds stays the same size, but there becomes a connection to one nearby.

## (Show slide of Victoria 8)



Until you get an image like this. Each small place becomes connected, invested with and to all the other small places, essentially growing each small thing as their sphere of influence grows. This I think is the nature of the kingdom the mustard seed parable is inviting us to consider in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Something more like a web, or a net. There are gaps enough for those to

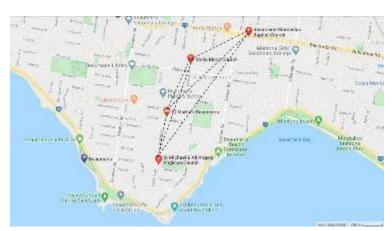
pass through who choose to do so, but enough things to hold onto for those who see it and want to take hold.

To really bring this home let me make it even more local.



(Show slide of Beaumaris 9)

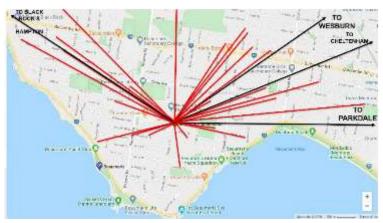
I have indicated here the Uniting Churches in our area. They are linked with dotted lines because the connections are not strong. They are there by virtue of us being Uniting Church, and that we have had things to do with them in the past, or that we know people there.



# (Show slide of Beaumaris 10)

In the same way the links to the Anglican, Catholic and Baptist churches in Beaumaris are dotted because the connections are not strong, but because we are all Christian churches and we gather for a couple of events each year.

But here is the really interesting thing about this model. Check out this image.



(Show slide of Beaumaris 11) This slide shows just some of the households that have people that attend Beaumaris Uniting Church. The growth of the kingdom, of God's realm, is not dependent on the growth of the institutions, but probably more between the households that house the people – individuals, families – who represent

to the community the face of the kingdom of God. And it then ends up looking something like this.



(Show slide of Beaumaris 12)

The connections between the churches, between members and churches, between members and members, across neighbourhoods, across suburbs, across districts, across the state, across borders... is a beautiful parable of the growth of God's realm. It may often be small, even hidden, or even, silent. But it is there, waiting, for the flower.

I guess I am saying here that the growth in this web or net imagining comes through creating new connections where possible and strengthening the old connections where viable, and seeing the growth as including the whole of the dispersed community in all the places they might be found.

You see this talk of the kingdom in parable or simile, is not just an exercise in theological gymnastics or biblical criticism.

It is an exercise in real life.

The parables give testimony to the often hidden and subtle power of the Realm of God at work in our lives and the world.

The parables tell that the reality of God's realm is at work now, and we are called to decide if this is the realm in which we choose to live our lives.

Real lives.

Yours and mine.

This is what we are part of.

The kingdom of heaven.

Nothing less.

Amen.

Sing – The greatness of the small.

 He knew the greatness of the small Who spied two pennies in the plate, And felt the trust young hands relate And blessed them all: He said what mattered was not large When in God's charge.

He knew the beauty in the small
 Who saw the sparrow in the sky,
 And crushed the corn which seemed to die
 When left to fall:
 He sensed a wonder in each seed
 Which God decreed.

3. He knew the weakness of the small
Who dandled babies on his knee,
And knelt with those who couldn't see
But dared to call:
He told the frail they would be strong;
He stirred their song.

 When we defer to sight or size, Believing big is always best And falling for the Tempters test, God open our eyes To see that Christ, the Lord of all, Smiles from the small.

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE – read by Nick Toovey

Loving God, in your mercy, hear our prayers. And all these prayers we bring in the name of the Risen Christ who taught us to pray saying:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Sing – "To what can the kingdom of God be compared" to the tune of TIS 147

1.To what can the kingdom of God be compared? A mustard seed falls where a field's been prepared, And there, where predictable plantings should be, There grows up a wild bush — as big as a tree! God of love, here on earth, hidden things still surprise: Loving deeds ... signs of birth ... faithful, Spirit-filled lives. Your reign is amazing, your ways still astound, Just like that new life springing forth from the ground.

2.A small bit of leaven will change the whole bread:
A poor woman sees that her neighbours are fed,
A church reaches out to the youth in the town,
A man shares his faith and God's blessings abound.
God of love, here on earth, hidden things still surprise:
Loving deeds ... signs of birth ... faithful, Spirit-filled lives.
Your reign is among us, creation is blessed,
When even a few faithful lives change the rest.

3.While some look for treasure or one priceless pearl,
God's reign is the gift wise ones seek in this world.
A girl sells possessions to help those in need;
A boy chooses faithfulness rather than greed.
God of love, here on earth, hidden things still surprise:
Loving deeds ... signs of birth ... faithful, Spirit-filled lives.
Your reign is a treasure that wise ones pursue;
May we seek your kingdom in all that we do.

## **BLESSING** –

Let us leave this time of worship today and invite all voices to be heard. When it is time to be silent, let us be silent. When it is time to be heard, let us speak. When it is time to do, let us act. Let us leave this time with the knowledge that God blesses our silence, our words, our actions, when they grow the reign of God wherever we are. Amen.

## Recessional - TIS 755

You shall go out with joy and be led forth in peace, and the mountains and hills shall break forth in singing. There'll be shouts of joy, and the trees of the field shall clap, shall clap their hands, and the trees of the field shall clap their hands, and the trees of the field shall clap their hands, and the trees of the field shall clap their hands, and the trees of the field shall clap their hands, and you'll go out with joy.