

Anglican Church of Australia

Diocese of Melbourne

ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

PARISH OF BURNLEY

Telephone: (03) 9943 8442 *stbartsburnley 'at' gmail.com*

www.stbartsburnley.org.au

WORSHIP BULLETIN



Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

19th February, 2023

10.00am Sung Mass

Welcome to St Bart's!

We are an inner-city Anglican church in the progressive catholic tradition welcoming people of any race, language, culture, age, ability, gender or sexual orientation.



We recognize and give honour to the first peoples of Australia, and especially of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, past, present, and emerging, the traditional custodians of the land on which this parish has its mission and ministry.

St Bartholomew's Church, Burnley

Our Vision

To live as citizens of, and invite others into, God's Kingdom.

Our Mission

The Mission of St Bartholomew's Anglican Church, Burnley, is to be a community who values the blessings and trust in the promises of God's Kingdom within the cultural and social context of Richmond, Melbourne:

- To live humbly before God and with all people
- To be dependent on God's comfort
- To be gentle with people and all Creation
- To hunger and thirst for the right ways of God
- To show mercy and compassion toward others
- To live with purity in motive and deed
- To be passionate for peace
- To persevere in the face of opposition

Based on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) Adopted by the 2015 Annual Meeting

CHILD SAFETY COMMITMENT

St Bartholomew's Anglican Church, Burnley commits to meeting all of the standards of the Child Safety Code of Conduct of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, and the Victorian Government's mandatory Child Safe Standards (Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015, Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Oversight and Enforcement of Child Safe Standards) Act 2016). The parish community seeks to promote the cultural safety of all children, including Aboriginal children, who come to us from a culturally or linguistically diverse background. We also seek to ensure the safety of any child with a disability. The parish community affirms that all children who come to St Bartholomew's have a right to feel and be safe. We are committed to ensuring that children's best interests are met within our parish. We have zero tolerance towards child abuse. The parish community actively works to listen to and empower children within our community.

Facilities including disabled and baby change room are located in the front entrance of the main hall. Enter via the main door of the hall. For all able access see welcomer.



If you want to ensure regular giving to St Bart's, but find you never have the right amount in cash, or are sometimes unable to attend on Sundays, then

St Bart's Direct Transfer may work for you.

Account Name: St Bartholomew's Anglican Church Burnley

BSB: 703 122

Account Number: 05009430

As a reference you can use your own name, or you can use 'Offering' & your name will remain anonymous with your personal details not appearing on the St Bart's bank statement.

10:00am Sung Mass

Presider: Fr Jim Brady
Deacon: Bp Alison Taylor
Sub Deacon: Cynthia Nyholm
Preacher: Bp Alison Taylor
Organist: Linda Kent
Mass Setting: Christ Church Mass – Philip Matthias

Organ Prelude

Gathering

The Hymn is sung as the Sacred Ministers enter to commence the liturgy.

Gathering Hymn: (A&M 258)

O thou who camest from above

Invocation & Greeting

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Sentence

Your Father in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Matthew 5.45, Luke 6.36

Kyrie Eleison

mp
Lord, have mer-cy, Lord, have mer-cy Lord, have mer -
cresc.
-cy. Christ, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer -
mf dim. mp
-cy, Lord, have mer - cy, Lord, have mer - cy, Lord have mer - cy.

Invitation to Confession

Sisters and brothers, as we prepare to celebrate these sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins.

(Silence may be kept)

Confession

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Absolution

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: ✠ pardon you and set you free from all your sins, Confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gloria

Glo - ry to God in the high-est, and
peace to God's peo-ple on earth, Lord God, heav'n - ly King, al - might - y God and
Fa - ther, we wor - ship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for_ your
glo - ry. Lord Je - sus Christ, on - ly Son of the Fa - ther,
Lord God, Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world: have

mer - cy on us: you are seat - ed at the right hand of the Fa - ther: re -
 ceive our prayer. For you a-lone are the Ho - ly One,
 you a-lone are the Lord, you a-lone are the Most High, Je - sus Christ, with the
 Ho - ly Spi - rit, in the glo - ry of God the Fa - ther. A - men.

Collect

Almighty God,
 you have taught us through your Son that love is the fulfilling of the law:
 grant that we may love you with our whole heart, and our neighbours as
 ourselves; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Word

First Reading

Leviticus 19.1-2, 17-18

You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

A reading from the book of Leviticus.

The Lord spoke to Moses:

"Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them:

'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. "'You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.'"

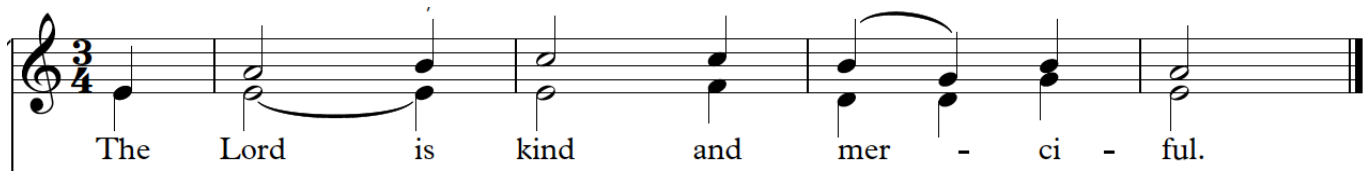
Hear the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 103.1-2, 3-4, 8+10, 12-13

Response



My soul, give thanks to the Lord, all my being, bless his holy name. My soul, give thanks to the Lord and never forget all his blessings. *R/-*

It is the Lord who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion. *R/-*

The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy. He does not treat us according to our sins nor repay us according to our faults. *R/-*

As far as the east is from the west so far does he remove our sins. As a father has compassion on his children, the Lord has pity on those who fear him. *R/-*

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 3.16-23

All things belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

A Reading from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours – whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future – all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Hear the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation (AM 374)



Whoever keeps the word of Christ, grows perfect in the love of God. See 1 John 2.5



Gospel

Matthew 5.38-48

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

✠ A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

On the mountain, Jesus continued to teach his disciples.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

Bp Alison Taylor

The Creed

Let us together affirm the faith of the Church.

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the ✠ life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Let us pray for all people and for the Church throughout the world.

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ has promised that you will hear us when we ask in faith: receive the prayers we offer:

After each petition:

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

And at the end:

✠ Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord:
And let light perpetual shine upon them.

Almighty God, you have promised to hear our prayers.

Grant that what we have asked in faith we may by your grace receive, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing of restored banners

Presenter:

I present to you these restored banners to be set apart for the service of Christ's holy church.

The Presider:

All things come from you, O Lord;

And from your own gifts do we give to you.

Prosper the work of our hands;

Prosper our handiwork.

Show your servants your works;

And your splendour to their children.

Let us pray

Almighty God, we thank you that you have put it into the hearts of your people to make offerings for your service, and have been pleased to accept their gifts. Be with us now and bless us as we set apart these restored banners to your praise and glory, and in memory of William Frederick Ricketts and Winifred Anne Ricketts, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

This is the offering which you shall receive from the people – gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet cloth, and finely woven linen. *Exodus 25:3*

O Lord my God, how excellent is your greatness;

You are clothed with majesty and splendour.

O glorious God, all your works proclaim your perfect beauty: accept our offerings of these restored banners, and grant that they may adorn this sanctuary and show forth your glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Almighty God, we remember before you today your faithful servants William and Winifred, and we pray that having opened to them the gates of larger life, you will receive them more and more into your joyful service that, with all who have faithfully served you in the past, they may share in the eternal victory of Jesus Christ our Lord. We bless your name, O Lord, because it has pleased you to enable your servant Kim to offer these gifts for your worship. In your name, we thank him. **Amen**

The Peace *(Stand)*

We are the Body of Christ.

His Spirit is with us.

The Peace of the Lord be always with you
and also with you.

The Peace is shared

Notices and Announcements

The Sacrament

Offertory Hymn: (A&M 454)

Love is his word

During the Offertory Hymn the altar is prepared. Gifts of bread, wine and the collection are gathered and brought to the front of the church.

Prayer over the Gifts

Lord God, by this holy exchange of gifts, you share with us your divine life. Grant that everything we do may be directed by the knowledge of your truth, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**



The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right,

it is our duty, our joy and our salvation,

that we should at all times and in all places

give thanks to you, almighty and everlasting God,

through Jesus Christ your only Son our Lord.

For he is the true high priest, who has freed us from our sins

and made us a royal priesthood

to serve you, our God and Father.

Therefore with angels and archangels,

and with all the company of heaven,

we proclaim your great and glorious name,

for ever praising you and saying:

Ho - ly, Ho - ly, Ho - ly Lord,
 God of pow'r and might, Heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry, Ho -
 - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who
 comes in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

Holy and gracious God,
 all creation rightly gives you praise.
 All life, all holiness, comes from you
 through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
 whom you sent to share our human nature,
 to live and die as one of us,
 to reconcile us to you,
 the God and Father of all.

Hear us, merciful Lord;
 through Christ accept our sacrifice of praise;
 and, by the power of your Word and Holy Spirit,
 sanctify this bread and wine,
 that we who share in this holy sacrament
 may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

The Celebrant takes the bread and says:

Who, when his hour had come,
 on the night before he went up to the cross
 to make full atonement for the sins of the whole world,
 offering once for all his one sacrifice of himself,
 took bread and gave you thanks;
 he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying,

'TAKE, EAT:
THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS GIVEN FOR YOU;
DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.'

The Celebrant takes the cup and says:

In the same way, after supper
he took the cup and gave you thanks;
he gave it to them, saying,
'DRINK THIS, ALL OF YOU;
THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT
WHICH IS SHED FOR YOU AND FOR MANY
FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.
DO THIS, AS OFTEN AS YOU DRINK IT,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.'

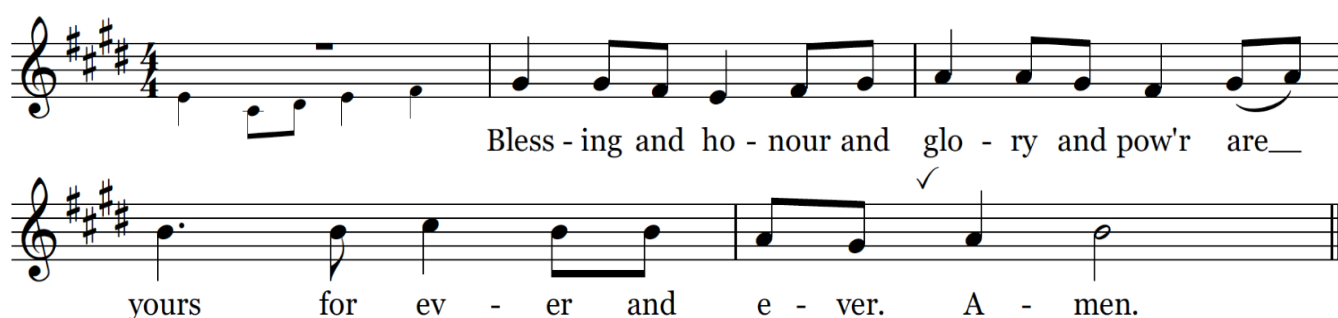
Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:



Therefore, in obedience to his command,
we commemorate and celebrate
his saving passion and death,
his mighty resurrection and ascension into heaven
and we eagerly await his coming again in glory.

We thank you that by your grace alone
you have accepted us in Christ;
and here we offer you a spiritual sacrifice,
holy and acceptable in your sight.
Through Christ, receive this our duty and service,
and grant that we who eat and drink these holy gifts
may, by your Holy Spirit,
be one body in Christ,
and serve you in unity and peace.

In your grace and mercy,
 bring us to the joy of your eternal kingdom
 with all the company of the redeemed.
 May we praise you in union with them,
 and give you glory through your Son, Jesus Christ.
 Through him, with him, in him,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 we worship you, Father eternal,
 in songs of never-ending praise:



Rite of Holy Communion

The Lord's Prayer

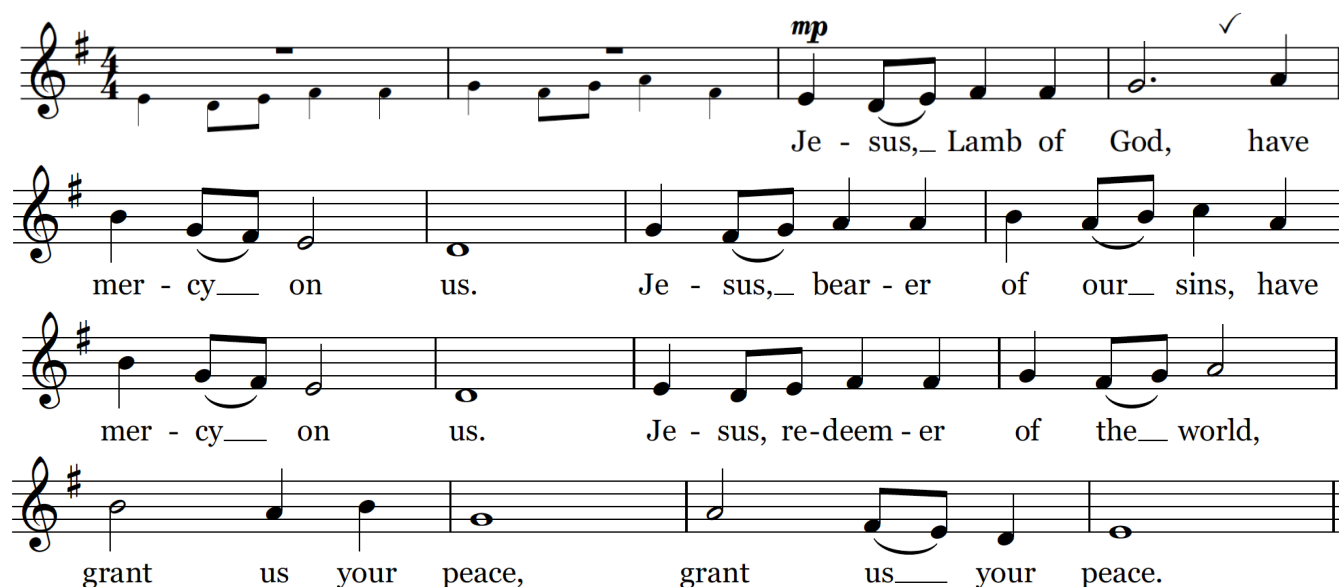
As our Saviour has taught us, we are confident to pray:

**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.**

Fraction

We who are many are one body in Christ,
for we all share in the one bread.

Fraction Anthem



The Invitation to Holy Communion

✠ This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper.

Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word, and I shall be healed.

Holy Communion is administered with these or similar words:

The Body / Blood of Christ. **Amen.**

All communicant members of any Christian Church are invited to receive the Sacrament. All others are very welcome to come forward for a blessing.

Communion Sentence

If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6.14,15

Please stand

Post-Communion Prayer

We praise and thank you, O Christ, for this sacred feast: for here we receive you, here the memory of your passion is renewed, here our minds are filled with grace, and here a pledge of future glory is given, when we shall feast at that table where you reign with all your saints for ever. **Amen.**

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

Hymn: (A&M 766)

Praise my Soul the King of Heaven

Blessing and Dismissal

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

May Christ the Son of God be manifest to you, that your lives may be a light to the world; and the blessing ☩ of God almighty **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Postlude

Prayer at the Time of Choosing an Incumbent

Bountiful God, give to this parish a faithful pastor who will faithfully speak your Word and minister your Sacraments; an encourager who will equip your people for ministry and enable us to fulfil our calling. Give to those who will choose, wisdom, discernment and patience, and to us give warm and generous hearts, for Jesus Christ's sake. **Amen.**

A Prayer for Ukraine

Lord of all the earth, be present with the people of Ukraine at this time of danger, fear and conflict. Grant that wise and peaceable counsels may yet prevail, and give to all suffering nations the freedom they desire and deserve. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

IT'S ROSTER TIME AGAIN.

Our Parish Administrator Warren Collins will be emailing you about your availability for roles for our church services from 5 March to 23 April inclusive. Do take the time to reply—we need everyone's participation.

Prayer Diary

For the sick, suffering, frail with age, and those who grieve: Joy, Milenka, Mira, Bruce, Hank, Robert, Bp John Parkes, Father Robert Whalley, and Nilani.

Recently Departed:

and for those whose Anniversaries of death occur in Years mind:

Hildegard Biste & Valerie Vernon (20th), John Fraser (21st), Sandra Hiller & Perrie Turner (22nd), Trevor Foggie & Philip Salvin [priest] (23rd), Lawrence Hirt (24th) and Peter Willers (25th).

For Your Diary

Today, 19th February, 2023 – 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

10.00am Solemn Mass *5.00pm Mass in recess until further notice*

Monday, 20 February

10.00am to 12noon Richmond Churches Food Centre

Shrove Tuesday, 21 February

9.30am to 5.00pm St Bart's Brotherhood Op Shop (Tuesday to Saturday)

6.30pm – 8.30pm Pancakes in the Guild Room

7.30pm Parish Council Meeting

Ash Wednesday, 22 February

6.00pm Sung Mass with imposition of ashes

Thursday, 23 February

10.00am Mass

9.30am to 5.00pm St Bart's Brotherhood Op Shop (Tuesday to Saturday)

Sunday, 26 February, 23 – 1st Sunday in Lent (Year A)

10.00am Solemn Mass

Thursday 1 March

7:30pm Lenten Studies commence in the Guild Hall

Sunday 12 March

Garden Lunch in the church grounds to welcome Father Walter McEntee, our new Acting Vicar. Bring food to share and something to drink. More details coming.

Shrove Tuesday

Pancakes at St Bart's



Tuesday 21st February

6.30pm - 8.30pm

Guild Room

Enjoy after dinner pancakes
and drinks

Donations (in cash) to the
Richmond Churches Food Centre.

And not to forget

Ash Wednesday Mass

Wednesday 22nd February 6.00pm

Blessing of restored banners

Today we are blessing two of our banners which have been restored through the generosity of Mr Kim Ricketts, parishioner. The CEBS/Saint Bartholomew banner is in memory of Kim's mother Winifred Anne (Nan) Ricketts and the Blessed Sacrament banner is in memory of his father William Frederick (Fred) Ricketts. Kim's mother was a seamstress by profession, so Kim felt it was appropriate that the CEBS banner should be restored in her memory, as it is a fine example of this sort of work almost certainly done by a woman. The Blessed Sacrament banner was restored in memory of Kim's father, whose background was Anglo-Catholic. In fact, all of Fred's family were devout Anglo-Catholics, especially his sisters, and that side of the family remains to this day devoted Anglo-Catholic church goers. The restoration was done by Grimwade Restoration Services, who also do work for the National Gallery of Victoria. Our sincere thanks to Kim.

Lenten Studies

Registration for the Lenten study series has now closed. The series will be held in the Guild Hall on 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 March, starting at 7.30 pm. Fr Walter will lead the studies, using the study booklet *God is on the Journey, Too* by Dr Christopher Monaghan CP. The booklets cost \$8.95 each and will be available for us soon.

Turkey/Syria earthquake

There will be a retiring collection today and next week, for aid for the people suffering through this terrible tragedy. Please give generously. Money collected will be forwarded to Anglican Overseas Aid who have set up a Rapid Response Emergency Fund. There is a collection bowl at the back of the church. If you are making a more substantial donation, you can go online to Anglican Overseas Aid at <https://anglicanoverseasaid.org.au/> and receive a receipt which can be used for a tax deduction.

'The Preacher'

The painting on the front cover of the Bulletin is 'Moment of hope: The Preacher II' by George Gittoes, 1995, Hazelhurst Gallery.

Anglican Church of Australia ~ Diocese of Melbourne

St Bartholomew's Church

Parish of Burnley

ph: 9943 8442

stbartsburnley 'at' gmail.com

www.stbartsburnley.org.au

2023 Parish Ministries

Art-Music Group

Convenor: Linda Kent

- lkent56 'at' me.com
0423-240-464

Bell Ringers

Captain: Jonathon Harrison

- jmharrison 'at' iinet.net.au
0490-450-974

Book Club

*(2nd Tuesdays of the month @
7.30pm in Café)*

Co-ordinator: Ann Brady

- ajbrady 'at' cobwebs.id.au
0423 -723-009

Climate Action Group

Convenor: Kathy Kozlowski

- kathykoz45 'at'
yahoo.com.au

Community Op Shop

- *(Tuesdays to Saturdays,
9.30am to 5.00pm)*

Managers: Caryse & Annabel

Richmond Churches Food Centre

(Mondays, 10.00am to 12noon)

Manager: Francis Flood

- rfoodcentre 'at' gmail.com
0493-104-144

Sanctuary Guild

Warden: Jonathon Harrison

- jmharrison 'at' iinet.net.au
0490-450-974

St Bart's Close

*(1-4/2 Canterbury Street,
Richmond)*

Guardian: -----

- stbartsburnley 'at'
gmail.com 0473-493-153

Social Enterprise Cafe

Committee Chair: Glenis Heath

- glenisheath 'at' gmail.com

2023 Parish



Governance

Churchwardens:

- Helen McDonald (People's)
- Cynthia Nyholm (People's)
- Glenis Heath (Vicar's)

Parish Council:

(meets 3rd Tuesday 7.30pm)

- Trevor Blake
- Glenis Heath
- Helen McDonald
- Cynthia Nyholm
- Dr Muriel Porter
- Tom Ransom

Parish Administrator:

Warren Collins

- 03 9943 8442
- 0408 020 446
- stbartsburnley 'at' gmail.com

Parish Honorary Treasurer:

Tom Ransom

- 0400 187 584
- transom2000 'at' gmail.com

Parish Honorary Secretary:

Dr Muriel Porter

- 0430 575 874
- murielporter5 'at' gmail.com

Incumbency Committee:

- Don Heath
- Dr Muriel Porter
- Helen McDonald
(Churchwarden)

53rd Diocesan Synod

Representatives:

Ann Brady & Jonathon Harrison

Dhakshini Saravanamuttu
(alternate)

Child Safety & OHS

Compliance

Churchwarden with Oversight:

Glenis Heath

Compliance Officer:

Jonathon Harrison

- 9943 8442
- stbartscompliance 'at' gmail.com

Worship Sunday

10.00am Sung or Solemn Mass

5.00pm MASS in recess until further notice

Mid-Week

Thursday 10.00am Mass

Ministry Team

To prevent internet spamming 'at' replaces the @ symbol

Acting Vicar:

❖ Right Rev Alison Taylor
0417-593-833

amtaylorms 'at' outlook.com

Associate Clergy:

❖ Rev Canon (Emeritus) Jim Brady
0422-566-184

fjhbrady1 'at' gmail.com

Honorary Lay Reader:

❖ Dr Muriel Porter
0430-575-874

murielporter5 'at' gmail.com

Organist and Director of Music:

❖ Linda Kent
0423-240-464

lkent56 'at' me.com

Weekly Bulletin, Prayer Diary & Rosters:

❖ Warren Collins
0408-020-446

stbartsburnley 'at' gmail.com

ACTING VICAR'S LETTER



In my Letter last week I wrote about the wonderful blessing that the singing of the Sunday psalm is to us. Sometimes we tend to let the music wash over us and not listen closely to the psalm's words, but these words can offer us deep understandings about both God and human nature.

Today's Psalm 103 is a good example of this. It is classified as an Individual Psalm of Thanksgiving, meaning that it is a psalm in which an individual person praises God for his goodness to them, usually for deliverance from some difficult situation. In ancient Israel, the person who composed the psalm came to a sacred ceremony, often in the Jerusalem Temple, and at a certain point, offered the psalm as a song to express their heartfelt thanks. This meant that everyone present on that day would be hearing an original song of praise (or thanksgiving or lament, depending on the psalm) to God.

Psalm 103 outlines in detail what God has done and continues to do for the psalmist. God forgives iniquity (that is, their very bad or immoral behaviour), heals diseases, redeems from the Pit (a reference to death), crowns with steadfast love and mercy, satisfies with good, and works justice for them and all those who are oppressed.

The word translated as 'mercy' in verse 4 of the psalm is interesting. It comes from the Hebrew verbal root *raham* and particularly its noun form *rehem*, meaning 'womb'. The psalm in its original Hebrew is making it clear that God's mercy and compassion is closely tied to the concept of what the Jewish people called 'womb love', that is, the love a mother feels for the unborn child in her womb. This gives us a strong sense of how caring and gentle the love of God and the mercy he shows is for each of us. It is also a strong feminine image of God, and a counter-balance to the old and now outdated view that the God of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) is harsh and unforgiving. We are able to experience a mother's love from God. Twenty-two of the psalms remember and call upon God's mercy, that is, upon God's 'womb love'.

Verse 13 of Psalm 103, which is not in today's portion, likens the love of God also to the tender love of a father for his children. This means that in Psalm 103 we have images of the love of God for us which is like that of both a mother and a father. When times are difficult for us, these are marvellous and strong images we can call up for reassurance.