

**Sunday 6 October 2024 Warragul UC,
Modern Pilgrims**

Reflection (Please note that the spoken words may not be identical with the printed text – journeys continue, & I sent an earlier version to the office)

Catching up on my reading after our recent travel, I have come across so many notes about significant dates. World Environment Day – that was in June, NAIDOC Week in July, Commemoration of the remembrance of the slave trade and its abolition in August, the International Day of Peace in September and now in October we have special foci on eradication of poverty, Food, children and the United Nations and a whole host more.

Life is busy, living in our world of 2021 opens us to so many possibilities, we have learnt so much over the centuries and there is so much more to learn too. All these dates remind me that we are on a pilgrimage – in God and in the midst of God's amazing creation. God's life which is a gift.

Indeed, thinking of God as gift maybe one of the best ways to try to get our heads around who God is. In thinking about God we can use the traditional terms of grace or salvation, or we can reflect about the relationships in which we share during our life pilgrimage. However we think, we ultimately come back to the idea of what we have as gift

Our reading from Hebrews is a little abstruse, but is affirming the same fundamental truth – no matter what your background and no matter what your life's journey involves, as a human you are a child of God, through the life, death and new life of Jesus. The unknown author quotes Psalm 8

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honour,

We did not use the Old Testament reading from the start of the novella, The Book of Job, an extended theological meditation on suffering and evil, in which Job refuses to turn against God no matter what happens to him – he knows God does not gift evil.

Nor did we use the Gospel reading from Mark in which people were trying to trick Jesus – and failing – on the issues of relationships and divorce. For Jesus, the hallmarks of behaviour for disciples were two-fold – respect and responsibility – respect for each other and accepting responsibility for our choices and actions. Respect for your partner, male and female, acting responsibly in the interests of the other, not focussed on your pleasure but on

what will enhance every person's life and your life as well. Respect and responsibility because all that we have is gifted to us.

As you know, Margaret and I have had the privilege of travelling in Europe including the UK for the last 2 months. Living in a different time zone brings to mind the words of the hymn we have just sung. Seeing so many places where so many different peoples have lived, worshipped, warred, faced plagues, invented new technologies has brought to mind the image that is the focus of today's service – we are pilgrims, and I hope these photos provide encouragement for you on your journey. It's not just little you on your own, but we are part of the great cloud of witnesses that is also referred to in Hebrews. We are pilgrims on Christ's journey, that began in creation, but was re-started by God's action in Jesus and is invigorated in us and everyone else through the ever-present Holy Spirit. All the pictures except the last were taken on this trip.

Yes, you are a modern pilgrim, we together are modern pilgrims in Vanuatu and Warragul, in Europe and in Australia, in mediaeval times and in the 21st century.

God as gift. People may disparage the notion of God, people may take refuge in whatever ..ism takes their fancy, people may become self-centred in their own ego, but it seems to me that trusting the God of gifts – father, son and spirit – as we go along our journey with all its ups and downs, provides both an anchor and a beginning – our response when someone gives us something is to quietly say 'Thank you', the response God seeks is humble, respectful, responsible service.

We could have sung One more step along the world I go, but instead I have chosen an oldie:

Sing TiS 561 "Who would true valour see"