



**uniting
church**
Kiama Jamberoo

8th After Pentecost
Sunday 26 July 2020

The kingdom of heaven is like...

We Gather

*Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.
This week, it would be appropriate to find a **green cloth** or scarf to signify that we are now in a time of "growing".
Start by lighting the candle. The candle helps to centre us.
Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

A video of parts of this worship service can be found here:
<https://vimeo.com/441505768/13808cc9c8>



Call To Worship

A tiny seed planted can grow to a mighty tree.

In small numbers we worship today, but as part of the worldwide Church.

A tiny bit of yeast can make the loaf rise.

Tempted to feel small and alone, we come to worship, part of a greater whole.

Wondering at the worth of our presence and praise at home,

we worship today offering what combined treasures we have.

Adapted from Spill the Beans, Resources for 8th Sunday after Pentecost, 26 July 2020

Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise the stewardship of the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation for the land on which we gather today.

From river to ocean
from campfire to hearth
may the First People
who have cared for this land
be blessed.

From breath to song
from step to dance
may those who follow your Songlines
guide us on the journey
to living honourably in this place.

From greeting to Amen
from silence to chorus
may our worship
join with the voices
of the First Peoples
of this Land.

(c) 2017, A.Koh-Butler

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. Amen.
Seasons of The Spirit, Resources for 8th Sunday after Pentecost, 26 July 2020

Sing - Seek Ye First The Kingdom of God

<https://vimeo.com/415940507>

Prayer

God of the universe,
we thank you that you meet us here, in this corner of the world.

We thank you that we matter to you, that we have a place in your divine economy.

And so we dare to offer you our praises.

You grace our gatherings, large or small, with the beauty of your presence, embracing our clumsy attempts to honour you, Lord of all.

We thank you that you look on us with love and lift our humanity, and that you look on the ways we fail you and one another in grace and forgiveness.

God, as those who know ourselves forgiven, loved and called to serve,
may we affirm one another, building each other up to seek to serve you, great God of all.

And so, may our worship here enable us to fix our eyes on you, equipping us for your mission in our neighbourhood and throughout the world, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Adapted from Spill the Beans, Resources for 8th Sunday after Pentecost, 26 July 2020

An Adaptable Prayer by Kathy Swaar

Help us, Spirit of Life.

We are tired, weak, worn.

Unsure of how to pray in these upside-down times,
when the needs so far outstrip the seemingly paltry collection
of words we have with which to articulate them.

What we think we know gets upended daily –
often from one moment to the next –
each conversation and headline contradicting the last,
each new piece of information increasing our angst exponentially.

When we can't see anything good,
when nothing is working,
when we feel conquered, separated, troubled,
alone and in peril, starved for connection,
naked and vulnerable,

remind us, Holy One,
that nothing separates us from your love.

Always for us – your heart ever tuned to the cries of ours –
you gather our tears, our sighs, our groaning, our laments
and hold them close, tending, honouring, and blessing each one.

In confidence and hope, trusting in your great mercy,
we offer our hearts and lives back to you, Holy One,
in worship and in praise. Amen.

<https://revgalblogpals.org/2020/07/21/worship-words-for-sunday-26-july-2020/>

Words of affirmation

The great good news is that we are given a new beginning every day.

And we are asked, whenever we are awakened, by the sun, or by new awareness, to
strive again to love more fully and include more completely.

God has done this for us.

Let us praise God by doing so for one another.

Seasons of The Spirit, Resources for 8th Sunday after Pentecost, 26 July 2020

Listen: This Kingdom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTArSLviKe8>

We Listen for God's Voice

Reading: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

³¹ He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it 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.'

³³ 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.'

⁴⁴ '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.'

⁴⁵ 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ 'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' ⁵²And 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.' ⁵³When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.

In this we find the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Open our ears, O God, to hear your word.

Open our eyes, O God, to see evidence of your presence in our midst.

Open our hearts, O God, to respond to your prompting.

Open our lives, O God, to the reality of your way of being in the world. Amen.

The kingdom of heaven is like...

a mustard seed

yeast

hidden treasure

a man who finds a pearl

a net

"The kingdom of heaven has come near" is an important theme in Matthew's telling of Jesus' story. The phrase is spoken by John the Baptist (3:2), affirmed by Jesus (4:7) and then Jesus instructs his disciples to share the same message when they go into the towns and villages of Israel (10:7).

"The kingdom of heaven has come near" - this kingdom is not "up there" or some other place we go after we die - this kingdom is here, in our midst.

Now, here in chapter 13, the writer of Matthew's gospel recounts a series of parables told by Jesus to describe this "kingdom of heaven".

In Matthew's telling of Jesus' story, these parables are grouped together.

With these parables, Jesus is painting a picture for us - using images to explain deep truths about what God intends for the world God has created.

Jesus' use of the term "kingdom" is political. The Greek word that is generally translated for us as "kingdom" (*βασιλεια*) can also be translated as "empire". This is a description of the alternative to "empire", in Jesus' time, that meant the Roman Empire.

The Jewish authorities were content to hear that as both a challenge to the Roman invaders, but were deeply challenged when Jesus made it clear that he also was challenging the empire they had built.

Today, Jesus' claim continues to challenge us to place the picture of the kingdom of heaven against our own "kingdoms", "empires" and structures. How do our systems measure up? In our democratic world, we don't speak a lot about "kingdoms", especially in a land that has had a woman as its head of state for the last 63 years - "kingdom" doesn't really work for us. And so I wonder whether we think that lets us off the hook in thinking about the power structures and systems that operate in our communities. Perhaps, for us, another way to describe it is "God's realm" or "God's way". How, then, does "the kingdom of heaven" or "God's way" challenge the structures and systems that we have come to accept and work within?

These images (in Matthew 13) are earthy and rural, deeply connected to the people of the land.

The mustard seed, the yeast, the treasure, the pearl are all in our midst right now - growing, feeding, waiting to be sought out, to be found, demanding our attention and commitment.

These images talk more about the *nature* of God's kingdom than the "content". It seems to me that, for Matthew, if you want content, if you want to know detail of what to do and what not to do, look at the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 and 6. This part of the gospel offers encouragement and warning in the context of the way in which the kingdom of heaven exists in the world we know. That is, when we choose to live lives that reflect the life Jesus lived and taught, lives of love and justice and compassion, lives that look out for the most vulnerable in our communities and offer space and voice to those who are often overlooked, this kingdom, God's way, is like...

Now I am guessing that some of you will have heard these parables many times before and probably spent a good deal of time thinking about what they mean. So briefly, the kingdom of heaven is like:

- a mustard seed - is Jesus being funny? The mustard seed isn't the "smallest of all the seeds", there are smaller seeds (eg, a strawberry seed), but it is a small seed and mustard was, at that time, weed-like, hard to get rid of, small but annoying, perhaps like lantana or blackberry bush is for us. The kingdom of God is hard to get rid of, small but annoying, weed-like, and it provides spaces of sanctuary, for the birds to nest in;
- yeast - alive, grows, gets through all the flour - the kingdom is alive, it gets through everything and it grows;
- hidden treasure and a man who finds a pearl - these images echo the call to discipleship - the kingdom is encountered both by someone who stumbles across it and also by someone who spends all of their resources intentionally seeking it out, and in both cases it costs everything they have - the kingdom is discovered both by people who go out looking and people who stumble across it, but it costs everything we have;
- a net where the fish are sorted - this echoes the judgment that is a theme in Matthew's gospel (remember the parable from last week's readings about the wheat and the weeds) - there will be a sorting but it is never our task to do. Matthew likes the images of the furnace of fire and the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" - but remember it is an image, a metaphor, not necessarily a place of burning and despair where the devil reigns supreme - but an image of what happens to our lives when we find ourselves on the wrong side of the sorting. Several times in Matthew's gospel, the writer describes our separation from God as like fire and where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In my experience, when we have taken the wrong path or done the wrong thing and are

faced with the consequences, it often feels like fire, and weeping and worrying is our reality until whatever it is can be resolved.

None of these images are complete in themselves, the parables never are, they are snapshots, or pieces of a larger picture. We need all of these images and the many more that Jesus describes, to form a complete picture of God's dream for God's world. So, the kingdom can be found by someone who simply stumbles over it, *and* by someone who intentionally seeks it out. But in both cases, it costs the seeker everything - this kingdom demands all of us, all of who we are, everything we have. God's way is both weed and yeast - its gets through everything and can be both pest and essential, either way, it is hard to get rid of. Even when we think we have nothing left to offer or to give, God's way continues to make itself known and nudges, niggles and nurtures growth.

In Matthew's telling of the story, Jesus throws these parables out there and then tells the disciples, '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.' (13:52) and then he leaves / moves on! Jesus invites us to draw from both the ancient texts and from our own experiences as we seek to share God's way in the world.

So, when we choose to live lives that reflect the life Jesus lived and taught, lives of love and justice and compassion, lives that look out for the most vulnerable in our communities and offer space and voice to those who are often overlooked, this kingdom, God's way, is like... a weed, hard to get rid of, an agent of growth, gets in everything, we stumble over it, we go looking for it, it costs us everything. And, there is a difference between God's way and all the other paths we might be tempted by along the way.

"The kingdom of heaven has come near."

May you find yourself shaped by it, growing in it, willing to give everything for it. May we find ourselves together to be more than a glimpse of it, but a community that embodies it, is shaped by it, and reveals God's love to the world.

Let us pray,

God of life, teach us that we are never so small, so insignificant, that we can't make a difference in the world. Give us courage to keep searching and to give all of ourselves in seeking to embody your way in the world. Amen.

Listen: Talking About The Kingdom of God (see video)

We Respond

Prayers for Others

Loving God, may our worship draw us closer to you, to each other and to our neighbours in need.

Give us a vision of your presence in the midst of our strife. Give us courage and confidence that you are with us, calling us to be your loving people in the world.

We praise You for all You are and for all that You do for us.
You seek us out when we go astray.

You look for us when we are lost.
You call to us and rejoice when we are found.

You are our rock and our redeemer - the path which is light to our feet, the well from which we can draw that which satisfies. We know, Lord, the wonder of having been blind - and then being able to see; of being lost, and then being found.

Today we pray for the parts of us that may yet remain in darkness and for those who abide in darkness; we pray too for those things about us that may yet be lost -- and for those who have not been able to find their way. We thank you Lord for your faithfulness in meeting us wherever we find ourselves, and for the abundant life you have made us for - the life you give us even before we know to lift our hands to you in thanks.

Today as we contemplate your mercy and your grace we hold before you our church. We rejoice in being able to gather in person again, to see each other and to see you in each other. We continue to seek you and to know how to reach out to others to share your love and your way of life. In all that we seek to do as your people in this place, we ask for wisdom and discernment. We ask for our hearts and minds to be open to the work of your Holy Spirit in us to know your leading for our lives and for the direction forward for this community of faith.

We pray for each person in this congregation today, those who might be struggling with personal worry, heartache, loneliness, pain or distress - break in their lives Lord and bring healing for the brokenness, peace and comfort for the chaos. Enlarge our hearts to support and encourage each other.

For all of us, when we are strong, help us to carry each other

When we are weak, help us to let others carry us

Remind us that we depend on you for all things

Lord, in your name and by your grace we pray these things. Amen.

Prepared by Narelle Dempster

Offering

In responding to what we have read and how we have heard God speak to us, we commit ourselves to moving with God's Spirit, breathing life in the world around us.

If you make a regular financial contribution to the Kiama-Jamberoo Congregation, consider putting that amount aside now and keeping it safe.

Generous God,
in the knowledge that we are precious to you,
may our thankful offering bring comfort, healing, and reassurance,
to your people throughout the world.
May the bounty you give us
be shared in the love with which it is given,
and may we continue to serve you,
through the giving of ourselves as you have given yourself for us. Amen.

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Notices

Keep an eye on the website, facebook page and the e-news for updates.

If you hear of or notice anyone needing a bit of extra support, please let Kath, Janice, or one of the Elders or Pastoral Partners know.

Sing - Beauty For Brokenness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPvioAt5fq4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxfBh9ay8gE&t=39s>

We Go

Sending and Blessing

A Benediction by Sarah Flynn Erickson

Go into the world with a willing heart to love and to serve.

Go with a strong will to resist the ways of this world and speak truth to power.

Go with the desire to knit together the broken place of the world.

Go with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the companionship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Adapted from <https://revgalblogpals.org/2020/07/21/worship-words-for-sunday-26-july-2020/>

Reflection

Where will faith be found?

Not in the rights-denying,
scarcity-mongering policies
of our governments...

Where will faith be found?

Not in the strategy-driven,
rule-keeping efforts
of our institutions...

Where will faith be found?

Not in the desperate,
programme-centric flailing
of our churches...

Where will faith be found?

In the acts of everyday people,
who see and respond to an opportunity,
to make a difference in their neighbourhood;
those who create beauty,
by eschewing what is deemed right and proper,
choosing, instead:
to take risks,
to make music,
to dance,
to respond to the rhythm that is all around...

Attuned to the rhythm of God, our senses are awakened:

to the gifts and the needs
of our neighbour.

And there, will faith be found.

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