



Wrestling, Belonging and Abundance

We Gather

A video of this service can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/443311255/09b0756b45>

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.



Steffi Ruben

Call To Worship

People of God, let your faces shine with the joy of a new day;

for in our faces the light of God's love shines forth!

People of God, lay the struggles of the week aside, but do not deny them;

for it can be through our struggles that God is revealed to us most deeply.

People of God, let us join together in worship;

for it is in our worship that God can know our hearts and minds.

People of God, let us raise our voices in word and prayer;

for it is through our voices that the song of God is heard.

Come, encounter God with us.
Let us worship together.

Seasons of The Spirit, Resources for 9th Sunday after Pentecost, 2 August 2020

Let us pray,

Like Jacob in the night, we are here, Holy One, to wrestle a little with what it means to be your children. We are here to allow that struggle to strengthen and guide us. We know you are with us and will bless us at our parting. Show us the way as we offer ourselves to this time. Help us to open our senses and spirits to all of who you are and all the ways you reveal yourself to us. We thank you for this opportunity, and we are ready, Loving Friend, to begin. Amen.

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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

Sing - Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ (TIS 537)

Go to worship video or listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUh5l-FhLps>

Prayer

Holy Presence,

we know you are with us, yet we long to see you face to face. We breathe, and it is you filling our lungs and beings with life.

We wonder, and it is you who teases our imaginations and delights our senses.

We strive, and it is you who calls us forth in the desire to be in communion with others and this magnificent planet. We struggle, and it is you who heals and renews us – body, mind, and spirit.

And still, yet, we long to see you face to face.

We wrestle, Holy Presence, with this longing.

In our worship, help us to know and experience your presence so fully our longings are quenched, and our spirits renewed. Amen.

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Prayer - Confession

This prayer uses some body movement to engage - you might like to settle yourself so that you have your hands free...

Holy One, we confess that we do not always recognise your presence with us.

We see struggle and sadness in the eyes of those who suffer, and we do not notice that this is you (*cover eyes*).

We hear grief and anguish in the words of the oppressed, and do not notice that this is you (*cover ears*).

We join in conversation with those who tell stories of deep distress, and we do not notice that this is you (*cover mouth*).

We shut our doors and windows when the smells and odours of death and decay threaten our peaceful existence, and we do not notice that this is you (*cover nose*).

Even in this prayer, we are asked to imagine that You are more expansive than we have thought before, and we do not recognise you (*cover head – “brain”*).

And we fight, we wrestle, we struggle when we encounter someone new or something different or an idea that challenges our understanding (*wrap arms around yourself*).

Forgive us and turn our hearts toward embracing all of who you are – all of how you reveal yourself in this world (*stretch our your arms and then cover your heart*).

Forgive us, and reveal yourself again and again, we pray. Amen.

Adapted from Seasons of The Spirit, Resources for 9th Sunday after Pentecost, 2 August 2020

Assurance

The good news is that even without our notice, recognition, or understanding, God is God – in all and always.

We are closer than we can know, and we are loved more than we can imagine.

We are forgiven before we even ask. Amen.

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We Listen for God's Voice

Reading: Genesis 32:22-32

²²The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' ²⁷So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' ²⁸Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.' ²⁹Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. ³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' ³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. ³²Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Reading: Matthew 14:13-21

At that time Herod the ruler heard reports about Jesus; ²and he said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' ³For Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on

account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, ⁴because John had been telling him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'⁵ Though Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded him as a prophet. ⁶But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and she pleased Herod ⁷so much that he promised on oath to grant her whatever she might ask. ⁸Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.'⁹ The king was grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he commanded it to be given; ¹⁰he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹The head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who brought it to her mother. ¹²His disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus.

¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.'¹⁶ Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.'¹⁷ They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.'¹⁸ And he said, 'Bring them here to me.'¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

In this we find the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Holy One, we long to be in relationship with one another, with our world, with you and all that exists. We sense our very humanity depends on the depth of these relationships. Yet, too often we feel estranged, cut off from that which is most vital. Lead us to an awakening of all that might yet be possible for us and for our world. Amen.

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If you follow With Love to the World or the lectionary reading plans, you will know that the readings for this part of the year are following the story of God's people right from the beginning. We will dip into this story every now and again as we worship together over the coming months.

A couple of weeks ago, Marion spoke to us about Jacob's dream - and of how Jacob encounters God, in spite of his cheating and deceit, in the midst of his fear and the conflict he had helped to create making for one very cranky brother out for revenge).

God reveals Godself to Jacob as he lays down to sleep.

"Surely God is in this place and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16)

Today, we pick up the story many, many years later.

Jacob is returning home after being away for a long time - more than 15 years.

Before he left home, Jacob had tricked his brother, Esau, out of Esau's rightful inheritance. Esau had tried to kill Jacob so Jacob had fled for his own safety.

Now, years later, Jacob approaches his home.

He is now a reasonably wealthy and successful man - he has lots of animals, slaves and at least 2 wives.

He is uncertain how his brother will receive him so he has sent a large gift of goats, sheep, camels, cows and donkeys on ahead (Genesis 32:13-21) and he had taken care to protect his family - just in case Esau is still cranky - by leaving them on the other side of the river. He had planned his escape route if it all turned nasty.

And now he is alone.

It is dark.

Jacob needs to sleep.

And in the night, a figure comes to Jacob and they wrestle.

All night...

Do you know the feeling of lying awake at night wrestling with something - a problem you are facing, something that worries you, perhaps?

It goes on all night.

And as the morning begins to dawn, Jacob is wounded.

But Jacob refuses to let go, and then, as morning begins to dawn, he demands that he be blessed. Odd perhaps?

If I have been awake all night wrestling, I'm not sure the first thing I would think to ask for is a blessing!

For his trouble, Jacob gets a new name, realises he has encountered God face-to-face and survived, and acquires a permanent limp.

As has been a theme for us over the past weeks, this encounter will cost him, he will carry this wound with him for the rest of his life. It is interesting, I think, that the Hebrew word that is translated for us as "struck" kind of gives us an impression that God "hits out" at Jacob (or us). But the word is much more gentle than that, more like "touched" and so the wounding is not so much violent as a reminder, something tangible that will remain with Jacob.

Because perhaps more importantly, out of his wrestling with God, Jacob discovers a new understanding of who he is and who he is called to be. He encounters God in a new and confronting way.

This story functions on a number of levels.

It teaches us about how we also encounter God - sometimes it is a great struggle, and the blessing we receive comes at a cost, a wound that we carry into our future.

But this encounter also teaches us about our identity in God - we are invited to confront God and discover what that confrontational encounter will mean for us.

At the same time, it is teaching something about Hebrew custom and practice that is explained in Genesis 32:32 - the part about not eating a particular part of the thigh meat.

What struggles have you had with God?

Have you let go when it gets hard or have you held on?

What do you know about who God calls you to be?

What wounds do you carry?

What about us as a community of faith?

Have we struggled with God?

Do we know who God calls us to be together in this community, in this time and place?

Do we carry the wounds?
What blessing do we know and celebrate?

Perhaps you are still struggling with God?

Perhaps, for you, the struggle is not over in a night or a day but has gone on for days or weeks or even years.

Hold on!

You may emerge wounded, but you will emerge blessed and with a new understanding of who you are and who God is!

The gospel reading this week is a familiar story of Jesus finding a crowd following him - it is getting late and it is dinner time. He gives responsibility to the disciples to find food for the crowd. And then they offer their five loaves and two fish, Jesus makes it enough - enough for all the crowd ("all ate and were filled" (Matthew 14:20)) with some left over. This story sits in stark contrast to the events that have preceded it, events that are left out of our lectionary readings.

Jesus had withdrawn to a deserted place because he wanted to be by himself (14:13) and the crowds had followed him. They couldn't leave him alone.

He wanted to be by himself because he had just heard the news of how Herod had killed his cousin, John the Baptist - executed him because of a foolish promise Herod had made to his niece.

Herod brags to his guests and shows off, promising his niece anything she wanted if she would dance for him.

She dances.

And then she asks for John's head on a platter.

Herod is trapped - by his ego, by his own misuse of power, by his greed.

And it ends in the death of an innocent man.

That story, the feast that Herod hosted to impress his friends, the rich and powerful elite of the region, the boasting and showing off, is set in stark contrast to the feast that Jesus hosts for the crowds who have come to be healed, to hear his teaching.

Jesus' feast ensures that everyone is filled - not with wine and sumptuous food - but with the simplicity of bread and fish.

And Jesus' feast is indeed for *everyone* - no questions - if you were in the crowd, by God's grace, you were fed - abundantly.

There will be times in our lives when we struggle - with our faith, with what we are doing or where we are going.

In the midst of these struggles, God promises to meet us.

May you encounter God in ways that transform your life.

May you know your identity and belonging in the God of love and life.

May your limp remind you of the blessing you enjoy and the love you are embraced by.

And may you experience the abundance of God's grace and be ready to share it with others. Amen.

Listen - In Full Flight (see video)

We Respond

Prayers for Others

Holy Friend,

we turn our hearts to the people around us and the world in which we live.

We pray for people who wrestle - with God, with relationships, with problems. May they wake knowing God's blessing. *[pause and name people or situations you know]*

We pray for people who are hungry - may we offer abundance in food and shelter and in hope. *[pause and name people or situations you know]*

Help us to be ready to respond to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of your people and creation.

We pray for people who are unwell - may we bring healing and wholeness in the love we share in Christ's name. *[pause and name people or situations you know]*

Sustain us as we embrace people who are hurting, and restore each one to life in all its fullness.

God of all, our world is struggling.

We are struck by an illness we cannot control nor defeat.

Nations still argue with other nations and boast of their power and wealth.

Violence is a reality for too many of your people.

Your creation groans under the abuse it suffers to support our lifestyles.

Bless us, we pray, as we seek to live out the wonder of your realm: as we challenge systems that are unjust; as we speak with and for those who are suffering and unheard; as we offer abundant hospitality to everyone we encounter.

Hold before us the vision of your way of being, and draw us ever closer to embodying your love and sharing such love with the world you Son died to save. For it is in his name we pray. Amen.

National Day of Prayer - COVID-19

The National Council of Churches in Australia is calling Christians in Australia to a national day of Prayer on Sunday 2 August to pray for all those impacted by COVID-19 in Australia and worldwide and an end to the pandemic COVID-19. They have offered this prayer:

Gracious God, trusting in your providence and presence,
we bring our prayer for an end to this pandemic.

We pray for your strengthening of all those committed to offering costly leadership during this crisis.

We pray for all who are ill.

We pray for those anxious about getting ill.

We pray for those full of grief.

We remember those who have died.

Aware of our fragility, we pray for your grace to sustain us as we do what we can to end this pandemic.

Your compassionate, peaceful and creative response to many crises is our model, including in our Sunday Gospel (Mt. 14: 13-21).

As we worship in resurrection faith [today], we offer our heartfelt prayer in your Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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.

For the ways we can see, feel, touch, smell, speak of, and taste your kindness and generosity to us, we give and rejoice. Bless this giving, we pray, that it might become an encounter with you beyond this moment and place. We thank you for being willing to wrestle with us. And we praise you for showing us a new day. 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 - Faith Will Not Grow From Words Alone (TIS 691) - (see video)

We Go

Sending and Blessing

In your face is the face of God. Go now and let it shine.

In your hand is the hand of God. Go now and open it in sharing and caring.

In your heart is the heart of God. Let it break open in compassion.

In your life is the life of God. Live it with joyful thanksgiving. Go in peace. Amen.

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JACOB'S BLESSING

If this blessing were easy,
anyone could claim it.
As it is,
I am here to tell you
that it will take some work.

This is the blessing
that visits you
in the struggling,
in the wrestling,
in the striving.

This is the blessing
that comes
after you have left
everything behind,
after you have stepped out,
after you have crossed
into that realm
beyond every landmark
you have known.

This is the blessing
that takes all night
to find.

It's not that this blessing
is so difficult,
as if it were not filled
with grace
or with the love
that lives
in every line.

It's simply that

it requires you
to want it,
to ask for it,
to place yourself
in its path.
It demands that you
stand to meet it
when it arrives,
that you stretch yourself
in ways you didn't know
you could move,
that you agree
to not give up.

So when this blessing comes,
borne in the hands
of the difficult angel
who has chosen you,
do not let go.
Give yourself
into its grip.

It will wound you,
but I tell you
there will come a day
when what felt to you
like limping
was something more
like dancing
as you moved into
the cadence
of your new
and blessed name.

—Jan Richardson

from *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*
Image: "The Wrestling Is Where the Blessing Begins"

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[Inspired by the story of Jacob wrestling in Genesis 32 and first published in a reflection at paintedprayerbook.com/2017/08/02/the-wrestling-is-where-the-blessing-begins/, which includes a not-to-be-missed song from Gary.]