

“Be Transformed” - Letting Go
Season of Creation - Land

Gathering

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 Christ candle. The candle helps to centre us. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

*A video of this service can be found here:
<https://vimeo.com/456903953/fe8f94e388>*

Welcome and introduction

Today we weave the themes of transformation and letting go with the Season of Creation theme of “land”. The people of Israel, in the book of Exodus, leave Egypt in search of a new land. They have great hopes for the future but this journey will be long and difficult, presenting challenges and changes. They will triumph together and fail dismally together, and, in time, they will enter the land God has promised them.

Call to Worship

As we gather for worship,
remember the land and the place where you
drew your first breath..
acknowledge the land places which have and
continue to break open the gift of God’s presence for you...
Come, trusting and anticipating those places where God may yet bring you...
Come, companioned by these lands of origin and revelation and hope.

Creator God, we come before you today as creatures of the land you created.
Earth, our home, cares for us and witnesses our actions, as you do.
We pray to be grounded and guided as people who are earthly and joyful, practicing our oneness with the earth.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Season of Creation 2, 13 September 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

Sing - For the Beauty of The Earth (TIS 137)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVQFEgT7E6c>

Or this beautiful contemporary song from Don Stewart:

Canticle of Daniel (NCYC 1997)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWzqPov0k3E>

Prayer

God of grace,
your love created the universe, and all that it contains.
Earth, air, fire, and water
the traditional 'elements' of all life.
Every part of creation made from the same tiny atoms of life-giving energy.
Each one made with love.
You give us so much more than we deserve, and you ask only that we love you in return.
You give us free will,
which allows us to choose
to say yes or no to your love.
Merciful God, forgive us,
for those times we chose to say no, help us desire to say yes.
Father, you promise to forgive us;
to restore our relationship with you when we turn and say yes to your love.
You invite us into a relationship
and desire us to play our full part in it.
You also ask us to treat the rest of creation as you do, with love and mercy.
You have given us a great responsibility over all creation and too often,
over millennia, we have failed to act wisely; we have been greedy and selfish,
and have forgotten to care and share all that creation gives us.

Merciful God, forgive us.

Help us to seek to be better co-creators, and to make the changes we need to so that our world can flourish as it should.

Your son, Jesus, has left us the example we can choose to follow.

Give us courage to want to choose his path.

In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Resources for 13 September 2020

Psalm 139: 7-12

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning

and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light around me become night',

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

Assurance

There is nowhere we can go to hide from God.

Forgiveness is hard to receive and often more difficult to give.

Know that God can cope.

Seventy-seven times

Is a lot of forgiveness,

and it is yours.

Receive it and go on.

Go on into this new week:

forgiven by God,

loved by Jesus,

and led by the Holy Spirit.

Listen - Search Me O God (Leigh Newton)

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

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Exodus 14:19-31

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.

²² The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all

of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.'

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.' ²⁷So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Let us pray,

Creator God, as you revealed yourself to your people in ancient times in cloud and fire, so reveal yourself to us. Help us to open our eyes and our ears to see and hear your presence in our world, and to open our hearts and minds to understand and respond to your call on our lives. May we be ready to be transformed, we pray. Amen.

A vital part of any transformation is the letting go of what was.

For the people of Ancient Israel, they had left Egypt in dramatic fashion.

The plagues had culminated in a plague of death to all the first born sons of Egypt and Pharaoh had relented and told the people of Israel to leave (see Exodus 5-13).

So they had packed up all their belongings and begun to move out.

And the Scriptures tell us they had made camp by the sea (Exodus 14:2).

Now I need to point out first that the account of this story in Exodus 14 does not refer to the body of water by name at all. It is in the song of praise, the psalm, recorded for us in Exodus 15 that this water is named as the Red Sea.

But this is not the Red Sea as we know it today. Scholars today, biblical and ancient history scholars, are pretty much in agreement that this was rather a body of water called the Reed Sea.

And this translation error points us further to what is going on in the telling of this story. If you have time, have a close read of Exodus 14 and 15, and Psalm 114. Scholars suggest that the account of the people of Israel crossing the Reed Sea is a conglomeration of the work of at least three different authors or editors, at different times in the history of Israel, all with slightly different emphasis and purpose. This event in the history of the people of Israel is so important that it is told and re-told, remembered and shared - but it is not the detail that matters so much as what it teaches them about who they are and who God is.

So, as the people of Israel are camped by the side of the sea, Pharaoh suddenly realises that he has lost all his free labour!

He changes his mind about letting them go, and gathers his army to pursue them and bring them back.

So here is their first challenge.

They are afraid of Pharaoh.

And their first response is to give Moses a hard time about bringing them out of Egypt (Exodus 14:11-12). This won't be the last time, the people complain about leaving Egypt - even though they know they were enslaved, they know they were being exploited, they know that where they are heading promises a brighter future. At the first sign of difficulty, they want to go back.

But God leads them towards the sea (14:19);

Moses stretches out his hands;

and the waters are divided (14:21).

The people of Israel cross the sea on dry land,

and the Egyptian army pursues them - but they become confused, the wheels of their chariots get caught in the mud, and they try to retreat (14:25).

But when the Israelites are all across safely on the other side (14:29), Moses stretches out his hands again, and the waters begin to return and swallow up the Egyptian army (14:27-28).

This part of the story concludes with the detail that the people of Israel saw the deceased Egyptians washed up on the edge of the sea (14:30) - they were left in no doubt about the power of the God who had led them out from under Pharaoh's power.

Verse 31 says:

³¹Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

So in thinking about this story in terms of transformation, let's ask ourselves some questions:

- what do you need to leave behind - either because you have to, or because you have chosen to? For the people of Israel, it seems to me, the choice to leave Egypt was a bit of both - choosing to go, on the promise of a better land, a home of their own; and being forced to go, to leave the abuse they were suffering and to go in search of freedom. As we have been impacted by pandemic, we have been forced to reconsider how we gather, our Sunday morning gatherings, our social groups, are simply not the same any more. As the world has changed around us over a period decades, the ways people engage with the stories of faith are not the same any more.
- who are you following into this new future? Jesus calls us to fix our eyes on him. God still promises to lead us, promises to be with us no matter what, for all time. We may not have cloud and fire to show us the way, but God's Spirit guides us when we have hearts and hands open. Are we looking for the signs of the Spirit in our midst, are we listening to the voice of the Spirit in each other and in the people around us?
- what challenges do we face and are we prepared to meet them head on, or is our first response to complain, blame someone else or wish we hadn't started? When we choose a path we believe God has shown us, a path believe leads to freedom, there are sometimes people who disagree or who feel their power is threatened. And those people sometimes come out swinging. Do we give in to our own fear, or do we keep moving, confident in the God who draws us into God's future?

In the Uniting Church, we are well acquainted with people who have disagreed with the decisions we have made - both from within and from beyond the church. Governments

have not liked our advocacy and commitment to campaigning for release for refugees or for constructive action on climate change. Other churches have not liked our advocacy for decisions about abortion being a health issue or in our ability to embrace same sex marriage. And sometimes, when the criticism gets personal, it is tempting to disown those decisions or try to water them down - it's just easier that way, isn't it? But God promises to be with us and calls us into God's future. We may not be entirely sure of what that future looks like just yet, but we know that God is with us.

So as things change, as we need to reshape worship to account for the new rules about gathering, as we need to reframe our language of faith to address the challenges of today's world, as we build a new facility at Kiama, before we find ourselves arguing with one another, we need to be prepared to let go of what was, both as individuals and as a community together, and to fix our eyes on the One who will lead us into God's future.

Let's pray...

Jesus Christ, we try to follow the way you have showed us.

Even when the path is guided by cloud and fire, we still struggle to remain on the right path.

God of cloud and fire, go before us, walk beside us.

Give us courage to keep moving.

Give us patience and compassion with one another.

Lead us, together, into your future, we pray. Amen.

Responding

Prayer for others – Michele Broad

God of Creation,

Earth is our planet home, the place chosen for us to live with sacred creation.

Help us to connect with Earth and experience it as a true home, to be loved and cared for.

Make us sensitive to the stresses and injustices on creation and fill us with your risen power to become your partners in healing creation.

We see our demand that the Earth produce beyond its limits, and our bondage to still desire more. You call us to pause from sowing, pruning, and reaping in ways that destroy the soil. We are called to face our greedy consumption of food and energy and resources. You assure us that we can be filled from the yield of the land.

We exhibit a lack of trust that we can thrive within the Earth's limits.

You affirm that our security is found in enough.

We confess our lack of courage to resist the myth of endless growth.

Teach us sustainability. Inspire our hearts with a holy imagination, to rise, freed from the demands to produce and consume to imagine a just, sustainable way of living, where all have enough, and all may be restored.

Too often we think of creation as given, instead of a gift.

You call us to leave enough fruit on the vine and in the fields to feed our neighbours, animals, and replenish the Earth. Yet we have failed to share what we receive from the Earth. You call us to fairness and justice.

God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this Earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the Earth.

God of inspiration, enlighten our hearts and remain with your world. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

God of compassion, remain with your world. In the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic, hear our cries and heal our world and all its people. Amen.

(adapted from A prayer for the Earth, Pope Francis)

Holy Communion

Please join us at 10.00am on Sunday 13 September for Communion on the lawns at Kiama. You will need to bring your own communion elements (Bread and wine/juice), chair or picnic blanket and anything else you need to be comfortable. All the COVID19 safety rules will apply. For more information, call Kath on 0409 650 118.

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join in communion this way, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. Now that restrictions have been eased a little, we are able to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you.

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.

Giver of life, we are but sojourners living on Earth for a while.

May our gifts of our hands, hearts, and tears contribute to the flourishing of your creation and your larger vision for life and wholeness, for this generation and for those to come.

Give us a desire to give ourselves fully to the work of creating your kingdom, here on earth as in heaven. Amen.

Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit and Spill The Beans, Resources for 13 September 2020

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.

Sending out

Listen - All We Long For (Trish Watts) (*see the video*)

Sending

May we walk gently
and be close enough
to hear you when you speak.

May you drink in the rain
and be nurtured by the critters within you.
May the sun and wind befriend you
and may you be held forever in God.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 13 September 2020

Blessing

Go, now, and live.
Breath of God to carry you;
Life of God to hold you ;
Love of God to give you hope. Amen.

For further reflection:

You might like to spend some more time this week reflecting on Psalm 139:

- ¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
- ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
- ³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

- ⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
- ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',
- ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

- ¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
- ¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.
- ¹⁹ O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—
- ²⁰ those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil!
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
- ²² I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.