

Be Transformed - Losing Our Way

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 parts of this service can be found here:
<https://vimeo.com/466443106/030abfbf34>*



Welcome and introduction

As we continue our exploration of “transformation”, this week we are confronted with impatience and uncertainty, we consider how we put limits on God, and we ask whether we are prepared to make the effort to change?

Call to Worship

Psalm 106:1-3 says this:

Praise the LORD!

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD,
or declare all his praise?

Happy are those who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times.

Do you remember who first invited you to worship?
We come in praise for those who brought us here.

Do you remember the first community of faithful ones you joined?
A Sunday School teacher who welcomed you with care and open arms?
A youth group who accompanied you with energy and open minds?
A small group meeting in someone's home?
A congregation, large or small, rural or urban, quiet folk or rowdy ones?
We come in praise for those who meet and receive us here.

Do you remember the God you have come to worship?
The One who delivered Israel from Egypt;
the Maker of Earth and Sky;
the Ground of all Being;
the God of Jesus, born of Mary;
we come to worship God in remembrance that leads to hope.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 19th After Pentecost, 11 October 2020

We pray...
Great God,
the beauty of creation reminds us of the beauty of your way.
Your teachings bind us together as pilgrims,
on a common path towards abundant life for all.
Your laws are sweeter than honey in a honeycomb.
Guide us towards your path, God,
and lead us away from dangerous roads,
so our words, and the meditations of our hearts may always be acceptable to you,
our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 19th After Pentecost, 11 October 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 / Listen: All Are Welcome

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9bOiAxwi4U&feature=emb_logo

1. Let us build a house where love
can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and
visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end
divisions:

*All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

2. Let us build a house where
prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of
Jesus:

All are welcome...

3. Let us build a house where love is
found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that
frees us:

All are welcome...

4. Let us build a house where hands
will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and
teach,
and love the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and
danger:

All are welcome...

5. Let us build a house where all are
named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and
claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to
rafter:

All are welcome...

© 1998 Marty Haugen from *Common Ground – a Songbook for all the Churches*, Saint Andrew's Press,
Edinburgh

Prayer

Your steadfast love endures forever, Holy God,
Your faithfulness everlasting.
Ours, we confess, is not.

Finite creatures, we view the world in finite terms.
We measure and parse,
compare and compartmentalise, judge by appearance.

We draw clear, solid boundaries between
me and mine, you and yours, us and them,
and betray ourselves in the process.

No divisions in your kingdom,
there is no "us and them."
Only us. All of us.

Forgive us, Father and Mother of Mercy,
for all the ways we exclude,
in the very name of keeping the faith.

Forgive us for assuming ours
is the only “right” way,
that we have somehow secured a patent on Truth.

Forgive us for our shortsightedness; for how quickly
we turn not just our backs, but our very hearts
away from you and your people.

Pardon, forgive, and restore us,
Author of life, for like our ancestors in faith,
we have sinned, fallen short, missed the mark.

Turn our hearts to what is true, honest, just,
what is commendable, excellent, praiseworthy,
and may those things fill our minds.

Assurance

“Rejoice in the Lord always;
again, I will say, Rejoice.”

The steadfast love of the Lord
endures forever,

and in God is grace and welcome,
forgiveness and freedom, balm and blessing.

Friends: believe the Good News of the Gospel and be at peace.

In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Kathy Swaar, <https://revgalblogpals.org/2020/10/06/worship-words-steadfast/>

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Exodus 32:1-14

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, ‘Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’² Aaron said to them, ‘Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.’³ So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, ‘Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.’⁶ They rose early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel. ⁷ The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”’⁹ The Lord said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, how

stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.'

¹¹ But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people.

¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever." ' ¹⁴And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Reading: Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet." ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ 'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.'

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

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Let's pray,

God of grace, you draw us into relationship with you, into covenant.

So often we struggle to figure out what that means so we try to go it alone.

Open our hearts and minds to hear you prompting us, drawing us back, to your embrace.

In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Well I have to say that the readings today are both a little bit troubling and a good deal challenging.

First, we pick up the story in Exodus 12 chapters on from where we left off last week. God has given a framework that will shape God's people into the community God calls them to be. And the following 12 chapters are mostly concerned with God giving Moses further instruction - about the law, and about the tabernacle they are to build.

Then we discover that Moses has been gone from the Israelite camp a long time (40 days and nights is biblical language for a long time!) and the people have become restless. After the high of receiving the law, the people quickly become impatient, looking to Aaron who, for reasons that are almost incomprehensible, invites them to offer their gold and then he forms it into the shape of a calf.

Maybe he just doesn't see the harm in giving the people what they want so that it keeps them happy and off his back?

Notice that the transgression here is not creating another god, it is creating an image of God. And, I have to say, even though we have no idea what it looked like beyond the word description in the scriptures, I am guessing it was a pretty unflattering image even if it is made of gold.

Again we have a bit of a translation problem, the NRSV translates as plural "These are your gods" (32:4), but scholars suggest a better translation is in the singular: "This is your God" - the one who brought you out of Egypt, says Aaron. This golden calf, Aaron implies, is the same "I am" who met Moses at the burning bush and who led them out of Egypt.

How often do we limit God to a shape we can fathom, to the ways we understand? How often do such limitations then mislead? For example, for how long has the church primarily used male pronouns when referring to God, and allowed an image to be projected of an old man with a white beard in the sky? On the one hand, we would probably agree that such a picture is a bit ludicrous - but how often do we still use language to describe God that perpetuates that image, and leads others down that path?

One of my favourite conversation starters with someone who tells me that they don't believe in God is to invite them to tell me about the God they don't believe in, because I can almost guarantee that, as they describe the angry, old man in the sky, I can reassure them that I don't believe in that god either!

What about how we worship - prescribing the shape of our services, the time, the place, the language of our prayers, the type of music we sing (when we are allowed to again)? We are often surprised and discomfited when these things change, and yet God reminds us, shows us, again and again, that God cannot be contained.

How often do we grow impatient in waiting for understanding or direction and so try to move things along ourselves? This story is perhaps an extreme example, but I think relatable in that even though we know the love and grace of God, we know we are nurtured and held, from time to time we have the capacity to be a little bit impatient, or as we see with the people of ancient Israel, a little bit silly even. We make our own plans, convincing ourselves it is what God wants, refusing to wait and discern, and then wonder why what eventuates seems a bit silly.

There is part of us, as we read this story, that wants to ask, "what were they thinking?" and at the same time, we know the answer to that is that they simply weren't thinking - and aren't we capable of the same?

So then God gets a bit cranky, very cranky even - and God sends Moses back to sort them out.

God does rant and rave a bit here.

More than that, God threatens to destroy them all and to start again with just Moses to build God's people (32:10). I'll still keep my covenant but just with you, Moses!

But Moses intercedes. He puts the argument that if God were to destroy them all now, what would that look like to the Egyptians? Not a good show! (32:11-12).

And then, Moses reminds God of the covenant they made *together*. Moses reminds God (32:13). Moses reminds God of the promise God made to make them a great nation and to give them a land of their own.

There is something really important here as we journey into the unknown. We need to be reminded often of the love and grace God has shown to us in Jesus, and will continue to show. Just as I try week in and week out to remind you of God's love and grace, so we need to be reminding each other - especially when things become uncertain or we are waiting for the next step to be revealed, and even when someone has been a bit silly. We need to remind each other of who God has called us to be *together*.

God has been with God's people throughout the ages, God is with us now and God will be in our midst as we travel on together.

And - God changes God's mind (32:14).

God decides not to destroy them all but to return again to the covenant - my guess is God is still grumpy, but God and God's people are brought together once more.

God changes God's mind.

So a question: How do we reconcile God changing God's mind with the hymns we sing about the God who does not change, with the image we have of God who is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)?

For those with time to look them up - Immortal Invisible, Abide With Me, and a more recent one, Fresh As The Morning - all of them speak of a God who does not change...

And it also raises questions for us about who this God is?

The God who brought Israel out of Egypt gets angry, is considering destroying everyone, and yet can be brought around by a good argument and someone who stands firm, by the memory of the covenant.

Which brings us to our reading from the gospel attributed to Matthew.

The parable Jesus tells in chapter 22 is also recorded for us in the gospel attributed to Luke (Luke 14), and in the Gospel of Thomas. Each telling has a different focus.

For Luke, it is all about God's inclusive welcome to everyone and the many excuses we give for not joining in - it appears alongside other "banquet" stories and has far less sharp edges than Matthew's version that we have before us today.

Remember, Matthew's gospel has a lot to say about God's judgment - Matthew is the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" guy.

And the way Matthew tells it, seems to be a conflagration of 2, possibly 3, different parables.

And if we are too quick to equate the king in Matthew's telling with God, we are confronted with a God who will eradicate a whole village because no-one wanted to come to his party (22:7) - a bit extreme, we might think...

So what do we do with this?

There is no doubt that one element to the story is God extending God's welcome to everyone - the good and the bad (22:10)!

The Greek word translated by the NRSV as "bad" can also be translated as "evil" - the good and the evil are welcome at the feast.

And then there is another twist: the king spots someone who hasn't got the right clothes on.

“Friend”, he calls him, “how did you get in here without a wedding robe?”
And then he has the man bound and thrown out (22:12-13).

One thing we do know, is that there is no-one in this story who gets it entirely right - the king doesn't, his guests don't.

Perhaps it reminds us that no-one comes as perfect, or free from divine judgment, as Matthew would put it.

Every one has the opportunity - grace is extended to all.

But some can't be bothered and some come, but are unprepared or unwilling to change.

As we respond to God's embrace, God's invitation to the banquet, the story of the golden calf would remind us to remain patient, waiting for God to reveal Godself and not trying to push God into a box or in a direction that we want to shape; and Matthew would remind us that we need to be willing to make an effort, we need to be willing to engage fully in the invitation to be transformed...

God of freedom,

your invitation to a life of liberation never ceases.

You call us to give faithful witness to your love, justice, and freedom.

May we be steadfast in faith, and our lives and community marked by our thanksgiving and joy. Amen.

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Listen: Come All You Vagabonds (Stuart Townend)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s27D7M8biul>

Responding

Prayer for others

Inclusive God,

why is your world so divided?

Why are we so binary?

Good or evil,

black or white,

male or female,

straight or gay,

rich or poor,

young or old,

we seem incapable of seeing the whole colourful spectrum that you created
and each of us as created in your image.

We have a compulsion to label and to categorise,
to separate and demonise.

Anything that saves us having to own one another
as family and justifies us
withholding all that we feel we have earned.

And while we are busy hoarding,

your children continue to suffer and

we are too busy to notice far less make a difference.

Lord give us wider arms
and bigger hearts
and greater understanding
to know that sharing what we have will not diminish us.

You bless us so that we might bless others.
So as we pray for wars to end, may we refuse to invest in all that causes destruction.

As we pray for homes for the homeless and food for the hungry
may we be willing to share the space and the wealth that we hold tightly.

Prise open our hands and our hearts, to care and share freely.

Heal the blindness that prevents us from seeing
and our muteness that prevents us from speaking out against injustice wherever it is found
and give us wisdom to know how to change things for good and how to empower others
to enable change too.

Inclusive God,
inspire us to be inclusive too. Amen.

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Holy Communion

Please join us at 10.00am on Sunday 11 October for Communion on the lawns at Kiama.
You will need to bring your own communion elements (Bread and wine/juice), chair or picnic blanket, a hat, 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.

Let's pray...

May we always be willing, O God, to use all that you have given us to transform the world with your peace and your joy.

Generous God,
make us generous too,
blessed to be a blessing. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Resources for 19th After Pentecost, 11 October 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

Sing - Abide With Me

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84YASWe3_2Q

Sending and Blessing

May you go from here to

see clearly,

listen carefully,

walk faithfully,

and breathe deeply.

And the Holy One - Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer - go with you, always.

Amen.

Joanna Harader, <https://revgalblogpals.org/2020/10/06/worship-words-steadfast/>