

Be Transformed Discerning the Presence of God

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.

Welcome and introduction

Today we wonder together about how we know that God is with us.
When have we "seen" God? How do we experience the presence of God?

A video of parts of this service can be found here:
<https://vimeo.com/469188548/fdb6b614e3>



"Was It Some Ancient Bolt of Lightning that Cleft this Rock in Two" by Roman Eye is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Call to Worship

Creator of All, as we gather in worship, make your presence known to us.

Show us your glory, light the way for us.

Lover of Justice, grant us grace and mercy today and in the days to come.

Show us your glory, light the way for us.

Go with us, Light of the World, light the way for us!

Let us worship God.

*Adapted from Sarah Erickson,
<https://revgalblogpals.org/2020/10/13/worship-words-for-18-october-2020/>*

We pray...
Where are you, God?
We long to see you.
We long to feel you near.
We long to be confident of your presence and accompaniment.
We bring our whole selves to this time of discernment and prayer.
See in our faces your creative genius,
and hear in our prayers and songs your melodies of life.
Guide and nurture us, we pray. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 20th After Pentecost, 18 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: Great Is Your Faithfulness (TIS 154)

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

Prayer

Show us, Holy One.
Show us the Way.
Show us the Truth.
Show us your face.
We are, we confess, lost.

Wandering in a wilderness of competing voices,
we get sidetracked;
sucked into the Babel (noise).
Conversations become arguments.
Compassion comes with conditions.
Uncertainty dogs our thoughts,
drains our spirits.

Like our ancestor in faith Moses,
we come to you.
Show us, we beg.
We want to know.
Forgive us for our lack of honesty.
Because that request for knowledge is really a plea for relationship:

to be heard and understood, accepted and loved.
Forgive us for substituting human certainty for trust in you,
and open our hearts that we may walk with you in newness of life.

Silent prayers of confession may be offered here.

Assurance

Regardless of the road in front of us, we do not travel alone.
The Presence, grace, and mercy of God are ever-present;
the protection and provision of the Holy One surrounds us always.
Believe this good news and be at peace:
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Kathy Swaar, <https://revgalblogpals.org/2020/10/13/worship-words-for-18-october-2020/>

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Exodus 32:1-14

¹² Moses said to the Lord, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people"; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight." ¹³Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' ¹⁴He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' ¹⁵And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. ¹⁶For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.' ¹⁷ The Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' ¹⁸Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' ¹⁹And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' ²¹And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; ²²and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; ²³then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'

Reading: Matthew 22:15-20

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' ²¹They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

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

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Let's pray...

Ever-present God, you promise to be always with us, yet we so often simply don't notice. At this time, in this moment, prompt us and nudge us, reveal yourself to us, that we may have a deeper understanding of who you are and who you call us to be. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

How do we *know* God is with us?

That's the question Moses is asking God in Exodus 33.

Moses says, "I've done what you wanted me to, and you say you know me, but I want to know you (Ex 33:12-13).

God reassures Moses, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." (33:14)

But Moses seems still unconvinced, and says, "well if you don't then don't make us go any further." (33:15) Moses recognises that it is God's presence that makes this group of ex-slaves unique or distinct (33:16).

God gives another reassurance (33:17).

But Moses pushes the point, "Show me your glory," he says (33:18).

So God says, "[my] goodness will pass before you" but you can't see my face (33:19-20).

I'll put you in the cleft of the rock and protect you while my "glory" passes by and then you can see my back (33:20-23). There is this sense of awe-inspiring power in the presence of God, but at the same time a gentleness as God protects and covers - held in the hand of God between the rock.

Now later, when Moses dies, he will be recognised as the greatest of all the prophets "whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10).

Let's unpack what might be going on here...

First we need to recognise that in the story of Moses, there are two traditions: one that says no-one, not even Moses, could see God's face and live; and the other that tells the story of God revealing Godself to Moses and in so doing makes Moses' face shine so much that he has to cover his face when he returns to the people.

So what is this "presence" of God that is described in the Hebrew scriptures, the presence that Moses demands of God?

What do we mean when we speak about seeing God "face-to-face"?

And what about some of the other words that are used here, for example, the "goodness" and "glory" of God that passes by?

And why does it matter?

It matters because there are lots of words in the Bible and in "church language" that we use, often without thinking, and that feel perfectly natural to us, but are either not used very much in ordinary speech any more and/or have meanings that are a bit obscure.

Perhaps by unpacking some of this, we can be better equipped to speak into the questions our friends and families are asking today.

And remember, the people of Israel are camped in the wilderness.

God has rescued them from the oppression of Egypt, but they as yet have no idea where they might be heading.

And how often is that us? Times when we have left the past behind, knowing that it's ways no longer serve us well, but we have yet to figure out what our future might look like.

Into this, Moses asks for, and God promises, God's presence.

In the Hebrew, the word we translate as “presence” is also “face”. So we have this almost interchangeable sense that to be in the presence of God is to see God face-to-face. When we see another person face-to-face, we experience an intimacy, a connection, and the sense of it when we talk about God is that we experience the full intimacy of God. So when Moses sees God “face-to-face” or when he sees the presence of God, he doesn’t see an old man with a white beard, he experiences a deep intimacy, a knowing, perhaps, importantly, a knowing of an-other.

Interestingly, in the gospel reading today, we have another “face”, an image, imprinted on a coin (Matthew 22:20). The face of the emperor on the coin is a reminder of the emperor’s power and presence in the land of the people of Israel. The situation that Jesus is pulled into is hostile and complex, a religious and political minefield. Taxes are crippling the poor and remind the Jewish people everyday that they are subject to a foreign government. The question itself is a reminder that the religious and the political cannot be separated - even though we try very hard to do that. Jesus’ answer leaves everyone with more questions - render, or “pay back” to the emperor what is his, and “payback to God” what is God’s (22:21). For the Romans, they hear no treason; and the Jews know that everything belongs to God.

But back to Exodus...

If we put the idea of “face” or “presence” alongside the word “glory” in the Hebrew, we get an even bigger picture. “Glory”, as Rev Dr Tom Wright describes, has a sense of being *weighty* carrying both the sense of authority and also a sense of visibility. So we could say it is like acknowledging the authority of God over the world, and at the same time seeing the radiance of God’s presence within the world.

So when the story in Exodus 33 speaks of seeing only God’s back, it is still a sense of glimpsing the trace of the presence of God - that sense that leaves a feeling in hindsight that we have encountered something special.

So perhaps we could think of it this way: the goodness or glory of God is always before us and yet we may not have the eyes to see it; the presence of God is always amongst us and yet we may be too distracted to notice.

The mercy of God is ours at every step - but we might not be able to sense it until we are reflecting later – looking back – seeing the visage of God, rather than the immediate experience.

So can you think of a time when you have intentionally sought God’s face?

Have you ever prayed a pray something like, “God, I really need to see you right now!”? Is that a prayer you are praying now for some specific circumstance that is challenging you?

Perhaps it is a prayer that could and should be on our lips every day - God, reveal yourself to me today, I pray. Help me not to be so distracted that I miss you right here, present to us, showing us your face.

As you reflect on past experiences, what goodness or grace has helped you make it through? What sense of God’s presence has helped you to keep going?

For me, it is sometimes a new appreciation of God’s creation all around me; and, more often, it is the physical presence of a person, and act of kindness, or a phone call at the right time.

Are there times when your experience of God's presence has led to a new relationship with God; or a new understanding, or a deeper relationship or understanding with God? For me, it is those times that, each time, build the strength of my trust in God, and build my confidence to do whatever it is God is calling me to. When faced with something I feel is insurmountable, remembering those times reminds me that God has been with me then, and promises to be with me now.

So - how would you describe God's presence to your friends and family?
As our community has encountered enormous change in the last 6 months, and as we wait and hope and look to an as yet unknown future, we draw strength from the promise of God's presence.

And so where do you see goodness and grace in today's world?
In such things we see God!
In such things we are reminded of the God who has promised us God's presence, who continues to be present, to meet us face-to-face.

Lover of justice, you set us on a path to freedom marked by the signposts of your goodness and mercy. Even when we fall short, you remain faithful, inviting us into right relationship. Help us to live as your people that we may be the witness to justice and freedom you would have us be. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 20th After Pentecost, 18 October 2020

Sing / Listen - Show Your Glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9dlupRMYdM>

Responding

Prayer for others

Creator God,
sustainer of all that we perceive, we join together in prayer seeking wisdom and guidance that we might show your amazing love to all whom we meet.

In our communities your word may be less obvious but is no less present, we present ourselves as your faithful children, ready to continue to spread your message of love and care.

We pray for the strength to do your work in our communities,
to bring the truly radical message of your holy word to all whom we meet.
Our world continues to be ravaged by disease, war, famine, and many other natural and human-made disasters.

This year, like so many others, has been difficult for people all over our planet.

We pray for help to see the promise of your light,
that no matter the problems we face individually or as a people,
that we will know your love.

As our countries and societies strive to recover from the difficulties this year has brought, we pray that, we along with our leaders, will have the wisdom to pay particular attention to those who were already in most need.

We pray today for people who remain on the journey and feel alone along the way...

We pray for those who seek your face in times of sickness and ill-health – who long to feel your healing presence intimately...

We pray for all who suffer under the powers and principalities of this world – who have been treated as collateral damage in a battle for loyalty to false gods...

We pray for our planet – for your true face all around us. Help us not only to see you clearly in all of its wonder, but to remember our commitment as stewards of your lands, your seas, your air, and your creatures. Guide us in our efforts to care and tend to your world.

We pray for all those on the margins of society, those who are demonised for their economic wealth, skin colour, sexuality, or ability. Grant us the boldness to tear down the walls built to divide us and bring your righteous justice to all.

We, the church, ask for your continued protection.

We pray that we will not be confined by the buildings that serve us, but that we will use the resources you have given us to do what is necessary to be truly radical as we seek to discern your calling to spread the message of your holy word to a world that is so in need of your love. Amen.

*Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit and Spill The Beans,
Resources for 20th After Pentecost, 18 October 2020*

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...

Generous God, out of our privilege we give.

Out of our longing, we seek your face.

Bless these coins, bills/notes, and promises and claim them for yourself, knowing we give them to you happy to release their hold on us.

Use them toward your mercy, goodness, and glory; we pray. Amen

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 - God of Dawn (Tune: Ode to Joy)

God of dawn, each day's renewal
brings the world into your light.
As your sun defeats the shadows,
drives away the darkest night:
we would greet this new beginning
as your call to start again,
lead us on with hope and courage,
make your will and purpose plain.

Christ, you walked the world as we do,
knew its human pain and loss.
As your love broke through the barriers
by your death upon the cross;
we still speak your gospel message,
though two thousand years have gone.
Help us now translate its meaning
in this present world of wrong.

Holy Spirit, inspiration,
light and truth and root of prayer,
as your challenge moves us forward
taking us we know not where:
we will follow your direction,
though the way may not be clear.
Shape us, change, recreate us,
so the future holds no fear.

Praise to God, who spoke creation,
giving life to time and space.
Praise to Christ, whose living presence
showed the world your human face.
Praise the Spirit, daily witness
to you ever-loving way.
Take us now and re-awake us,
challenge us to use this day.

© Marjorie Dobson

Sending and Blessing

As we leave our time together God looks on in love.
We are treasured children, priceless in God's eyes,
let that knowledge lift you.

Spill The Beans, Resources for 20th After Pentecost, 18 October 2020

For Reflection:

Imago Dei

We bear the marks
of grace upon our face,
carry within us God's DNA:
God-made.
Sparks of divinity
course through our veins;
our warp and weft,
the stuff of stars.
God shaped...
and so,
we are.

Heaven-made creatures,
birthed from earth,
we dance between the world and
universe:
God's own.
Flesh and blood
and soul and bone
combined in
holy mystery.
God loved...
and we,
God's mastery.

Spill The Beans, Resources for 20th After Pentecost, 18 October 2020