

Taking a Risk

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 decorate the table. 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 the readings and reflection for this service can be found here:

<https://vimeo.com/479753013/06a2669107>



Welcome and introduction

Welcome!

Welcome to this time of worship together.

And thank you again for your patience with the ways we now have to operate - whether it is signing in, remembering not to mingle, and staying appropriately distanced from one another. It is all part of how we commit to God and to one another to keep each one of God's children safe.

Light candle

And so we light a candle to remind us of God's presence with us always, and to draw us once more to the Christ, the Light of the World, whose light shines into even the darkest places of the world and cannot be overcome.

Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise the stewardship of the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation for the land on which we gather today. Our indigenous brothers and sisters have cared for this place since time immemorial and pay our respects to them and their elders, past, present and emerging. We commit ourselves to the continuing work of seeking justice and reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship (Psalm 123)

From *The Message*:

- ¹ I look to you, heaven-dwelling God,
look up to you for help.
- ² Like servants, alert to their master's commands,
like a maiden attending her lady,
We're watching and waiting, holding our breath,
awaiting your word of mercy.

Let us pray,
God, you have created the beauty that surrounds us: oceans and mountains, fields and forests.
And you have called us into this new day.
Help us to lift our eyes to you.
Hold our attention as we watch and wait,
knowing that your grace and mercy always, always break through even our deepest despair.
As we gather, hold us with your grace, and inspire us with your love. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Listen: We Give Our Hands To You (Seasons 1)

Prayer

Generous God,
giver of all good things,
giver of life itself,
we worship and adore you.
You created the earth
and asked us to care for it.
We took control
and began to exploit the resources you gave us.
You gave us enough and more to share.
We hoarded as though things were scarce and let others go hungry and voiceless.
God,
if we have learned nothing else in this season,
may we never forget how connected we all are across the world.
When one part of the body hurts,
all suffer.
So, God,
before we lose sight of all that you've taught us,
unclench our hands
and release in us your generosity.
Convict us in our worship
of your call to us to clothe the naked,
to feed the hungry,
to house the homeless,
to give sight to the blind and healing to the lame—
such is your power and your faith in us.
May our worship then renew and equip us
to serve you by serving the world.
Amen.

Spill The Beans resources for 15 November 2020, p.113

Words of affirmation

In this time and in this place, we are confronted by who we are before a holy God.
And in this time and in this place, God meets us with love and forgiveness.
Hear then, Christ's words of grace to you - you are forgiven, you are loved.

Thanks be to God!

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Judges 4:1-7

The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. ²So the Lord sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim. ³Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly for twenty years.

⁴ At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. ⁵She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgement. ⁶She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, 'The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, "Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. ⁷I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.' '

Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." ²¹His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." ²³His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." ²⁶But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

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

Thanks be to God!

Prayer for Illumination from Sarah Erickson

As the Scriptures are read and the Word is proclaimed, show us how to respond when you call, especially when that call leads us away from our certainties, calls into question our discipleship and leads us to confront uncomfortable truths. Amen.

<https://revgalblogpals.org/2020/11/10/worship-words-for-15-november-use-those-talents-edition/>

Reflection

Today is the only time in the 3 year cycle of the lectionary that we get a look at the book of Judges. And Deborah definitely doesn't get enough airtime, so I thought it important to pause and take a closer look.

And that parable - well, I am guessing most of us know it well and have been content for it to challenge us about using the gifts and skills we have in ministry and mission - which it does. But perhaps it has more to say to us...

Let's start with Deborah.

Well let's start at the beginning of the book of Judges, because as we read the first few chapters, we realise there is already a pattern: the people of Israel do the right thing for a while and then they don't. They lose their way, "do what is evil in the sight of the Lord" (4:1).

This usually results in them finding themselves defeated by a foreign king.

Then they cry out to God.

And God sends them someone to drag them back - this time it is Deborah. But the book of Judges describes this cycle 12 times with 12 different judges! [will they ever learn?!!]

Deborah is described as a prophetess (4:4). Now most prophetesses are linked to the temple, or at least to the priestly tribe, but there is no mention of that here - Deborah seems to come from ordinary origins, from the edges, as do a number of the judges in this period of Israel's history. Before the priests and kings had secured power in Israel, their leaders were drawn from across their diversity and many came from what we would describe as "the edges".

The NRSV translation, says Deborah was the "wife of Lappidoth". It is interesting here that the Hebrew literally translates as "woman of torches". So perhaps the meaning is more like that she is a fiery woman or a woman of spirit.

And she was "judging Israel". Now that doesn't mean she sat as a judge like we understand that today. The judges were more like regional chiefs - they resolved internal disputes, but they also acted on behalf of the whole region in negotiating trade and other external matters. The judges were also senior advisers to the military.

Deborah sat in a public place, probably a well-travelled trading route, between Ramah and Bethel (4:5) and people came to her seeking her wisdom and hoping she could sort out their disputes. The section we read begins the story of her giving advice to a military commander about how they were going to reclaim some of the land they had lost in the previous round of disobedience and subsequent oppression.

While the writers of Judges make no comment or judgement about her as a woman, as a prophet, as a judge, it is clear that she is one remarkable woman. There is little doubt that for her to be accepted as a judge she would have had to overcome expectations in relation to her role as a woman. Sitting in a public place day after day, offering wisdom and resolving disputes must have had its moments - both good and not so good. I can't imagine that everyone was always happy with her pronouncements - yet she judges for about 40 years! As Deborah leads her people, she, at the same time, passes on the wisdom of God and works to assist her people to do what God has commanded (4:6).

I should warn you that if you read on, this story is extremely violent - it is not for the faint-hearted. First of all the army of Israel, led by Barak, completely annihilates their enemy, and then the opposing army's general, Sisera, is murdered with enough gruesome detail to

keep small children awake for weeks (see the rest of chapter 4 and remember the tent peg!).

Perhaps this is why we tend to steer clear of Judges and many more of the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures. But the challenge is to engage with them - they are here for a reason, kept as part of the Scriptural Canon for a reason, put before us to study and learn from. Who is God in all this? Judges confronts us with a God who leads God's people to war, who seems to condone extreme violence.

The stories of the Judges do depict a pattern of human behaviour that is all too common in universal human experience: a period of peace and well-being; disobedience, suffering and oppression; and a time of returning and rediscovering. And then the cycle begins again.

The God of these stories is the God of the Covenant - responding to a people who have not kept up their side of the deal.

Many more traditional readings of the texts attribute the violence to God - but I think closer readings reveal that the violence is usually perpetrated by men and women who are out of synch with the Covenant to which God has called them.

And perhaps a closer reading of these stories will reveal a complex interplay of politics, culture, gender and faith, perhaps more closely reflecting the challenges we face today than we first imagined. I commend the book of Judges to you for further reflection.

Which takes me to the parable we have heard from Matthew's gospel. Often this parable is interpreted to encourage the use of our gifts and skills, rather than burying them where they cannot grow. But perhaps there is more...

A landlord leaves his 3 servants with part of his estate. The amount he entrusts to his servants is said to be a vast sum of money. So immediately, the hearer's interest is tweaked - this is not just a test of loyalty - there is something else going on here - this is not just about money.

It is about a time when the Master will be away, the time between Jesus leaving the earth and his return - it is about our time.

The Master bequeaths an abundance to each servant - even the one who seems to get the least is bequeathed a vast gift.

The first traded his and doubled his money.

The second invested his and also doubled his money.

The third buries the money in the ground and returns it to his master.

The first two are congratulated for their effort, "good and trustworthy", they are affirmed (25:21 and 23). But the third is thrown into the place of darkness and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" - Matthew's favourite depiction of a place of suffering (25:30).

More than simply using our gifts and talents, one on reading, this is about taking risks.

Each of us is given an enormously generous opportunity so perhaps the message is to "step up" and to take a risk with what we have been given.

Trading and investing is risky - there are no guarantees as to the outcome - but risking investment is congratulated and rewarded. Perhaps, then, this is about not simply using the gifts we have but investing them, trading on them, putting ourselves "out there" for the sake of God's kingdom. And trusting that God will bless our risk-taking abundantly.

And this is what Deborah has done - she has stepped into leadership despite the cultural restrictions placed on her and she has risked the word of God to challenge the oppressing armies. She has called them back to the covenant and to trust in God's leading once more.

There is no doubt, on this reading of the parable, that burying what is entrusted to us, failing to take a risk with the abundance entrusted to us, is not recommended. When God sends us into the world to share good news, to be agents of God's love, burying our heads in the sand is simply not an option!

But even this is a little problematic. The landowner's response to the one who buries his money is extreme. It troubles me to equate the Jesus of the gospels, or the God of this Jesus, with the description of the landowner as a "harsh man" (25:24) or with the landowner's extreme response (25:26-30). The "weeping and gnashing of teeth", while a phrase that certainly tweaks the imagination, does little for me as "good news".

But there is also another possibility. When we think about the parables, we are often quick to identify God in them, usually as the "king" or in this case, the landowner.

But what if God is not the landowner? What if this parable is really about challenging the way the world works, in contrast to God's way?

The absent land owner is a familiar image - the wealthy one who leaves his property in the care of others expecting that they will make him or her more money while he or she is away. Investing and trading are ways of the world, they are ways people become incredibly wealthy usually at the expense of people less able to engage.

Burying the money in the ground, then, was the cautious thing to do and yet also draws attention to the injustice of a system where the rich get richer at the expense of the poor getting poorer.

What if this is a protest? Here is someone who refuses to take part in the injustice of that kind of economy. And the reality is that he will suffer for his stand. The wrath we see in the story is that of a rich and powerful person caught out in their exploitation, called out by the one the system usually silences.

Read this way, the parable is about the consequences of taking the kingdom road. Far from being easy and carefree, speaking truth to power invariably leads to suffering.

Read in this way, we are confronted with our own willingness to engage with the powers of the world and benefit from their reward rather than challenge their assumptions and seek justice and the good of all.

And, like a good parable, it is, perhaps, all of these interpretations and so much more...

I will leave it to you to reflect...

Let's pray,

Holy Wisdom, open our hearts and minds we pray.

Help us to wrestle with the Scriptures and to be confronted with the challenges we find there. Break through our comfortable interpretations of your way that suit us but keep others bound. Free us from our own chains. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Listen: Freedom!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AuR8DVmQJQ&feature=emb_logo

Responding

Prayer for others

Healing God, we remember today, people we know who are broken:

broken in body;

broken in mind;

broken in spirit.

We pray especially for people who are struggling with their health, folk we know who are grieving, people who struggle to make sense of the world and their place in it.
May we be agents of your healing love and grace.

God of peace, we bring before you people and places where peace is not known:
places where nations are at war;
where communities are in conflict;
families who suffer violence whether physical, emotional or psychological;
people who struggle with anxiety or the strain of daily living.
May we be agents of your wholeness and peace.

God of justice, we bring before you people who are crying out to be heard:
our indigenous brothers and sisters longing for reconciliation and a meaningful voice in our government's decision making;
people who are homeless and long for a safe place to live;
people who bear the brunt of racist policies and assumptions;
people across the world who live under the burden of oppressive regimes.
Help us to raise our voices with them and may we be agents of your justice.

God you have reminded us that all humanity is connected.
We are dependent on one another and on the earth that you created.
So, help us to live in love, caring for one another, building up one another in love and reverence.

May we never avert our eyes when any of your children suffers but instead hear you calling us to make a difference.
May we never feel self-sufficient but always be aware of how we need each other.
May we never be silent when our voices should be raised in protest.
God it is not your will that any should suffer,
so help us to pray for
and work towards justice,
inclusion,
equity and love
with all that we have,
bearing one another's burdens, sharing one another's sorrows.
God, help us to use our power wisely and always for good
until we see your kingdom come and your will done.
Amen.

Based on Spill The Beans resources for 15 November 2020, p.114

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,
we bring ourselves,
withholding nothing that you have given us.
Use our gifts and skills, our time and our wealth, to change the world,
beginning right where we are. Amen.

Notices:

- people to deliver hard copies - they will be ready in about an hour
- notice sheets - please only take one if you do not receive it by email - it is a work in progress to figure out how many we need and who will need them delivered...
- if you would like to receive the notices by email, then please let us know and we will make sure you get added to the list.
- the BBQ - in the notices - is for KBECET - so if you can help out on the day, please let Marion Haigh know
- Advent - devotional studies - \$5 - please put your name on the sign up sheet so I know how many to get printed.

Sending out

Listen - As We Go Now (Seasons 6-6)

As we go now from this moment,
as we leave behind our time together.
May we walk with one another,
may we help each other on the way.

As we go now from this moment,
as we go into the future together.
May we treasure one another,
may we realise how precious we are.
May we realise how precious we are.
May we realise how precious we are.

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Words and Music: Stephen Fischbacher

Sending and Blessing

As you go from this place, may God strengthen you to be a risk-taker!
May Jesus' life inspire you to extravagant acts of love and grace.
And may God's Spirit hold you, embrace you and fling you into the world.

Go in peace to love and serve the world, in the name of Christ. Amen.