

Sky Sunday

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 in a time of "growing". You might like to have another rock ready to your sacred space. Start by lighting the candle. The candle helps to centre us. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*



*A video of the prayers, readings and reflection can be found here:
<https://vimeo.com/607266061/84afc32958>*

Welcome!

We worship this Sunday with the skies.

We celebrate with the clouds, the winds, the dusk and the dawn.

We listen to the sounds of sky proclaiming God's presence.

We stand in awe before the vast reaches of space above us and thank God for the fragile piece of stardust we call Earth.

Introduction

Have you collected a stone this week?

What word or thought have you written on it?

Place it in your sacred space now asking God to speak to you today.

We come together again, together in spirit and heart, if not in person.

Welcome to those following online or on the printed material.

You are welcome here, to spend time with God and with each other.

This is the third week of our Season of Creation – celebrating Sky.

Today is Sky Sunday.

The readings for the Season of Creation this week invite us to contemplate the sky.

In Australia, we have lots of sky - vast expanses of blue during the day, and at night the wonders of the milky way - billions of specks of light.

“The heavens tell the of the glory of God”, says the Psalmist in Psalm 19. And we look at the milky way, it is not hard to understand what the Psalmist was trying to say!
But Jeremiah 4 and Mark 15 also tell us that sometimes the skies reflect chaos and grief - the sky mourns at the chaos of earth, at the Son of Man hanging on a cross.
No wonder the ancients sought to understand the signs in the sky!
As we look to the sky, as we live and move beneath its covering, what more can we understand of who God is?

May we worship together in the grace of God, the name of Jesus Christ and in fellowship through the Holy Spirit.

Acknowledgement of Country

From the roar of the blow hole to the cliffs of the escarpment,
down gushing waterfalls and along winding creeks and rivers,
we acknowledge the traditional custodians,
the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation,
who have cared for this land since time immemorial,
and we ask God’s blessing on them this day.

Call to Worship

We invite the skies to worship with us:
the subtle orange skies at dawn
and the bold red skies at sunset.

We join the heavens in praising God:
proclaiming God’s glory across the globe
and hailing God’s name with the evening stars.

We join with the atmosphere in worship:
the air, the moisture, the oxygen,
the wind and all the expressions of God’s Spirit.

We call the clouds to celebrate with storms:
to carry the life giving drops of rain,
that give hope and healing to Earth.

We invite the winds to join our petitions:
to carry our prayers to God above
and breathe our hopes to Christ in person.

We celebrate the song of the skies!
Sing! Skies! Sing!

God, our Creator, as we look into the skies we celebrate the wonders of the worlds that surround us. Help us to see your presence in the evening sky, your spirit in the wind, your mercy in the falling rain. Teach us to hear the good news from the sky celebrating the glory of God in Earth. Rejoice with us as we behold the dawn revealing the mysteries of the skies above and Earth below. In the name of Christ who unites heaven and Earth. Amen.

Sing: I, The Lord of Sea and Sky (*Together in Song 658*)

<https://youtu.be/CSODPhE-0ng>

Prayer of Confession - Based on Jeremiah 4:23–28

Jeremiah was a prophet who lived a long time ago. A prophet is someone who reminds people to live according to God's ways. Jeremiah lived during a dangerous and hard time, and tried to help people stay faithful in the midst of all these difficulties.

Jeremiah, what do you see?

I see lands made barren and dry,

I see the heavens made dark.

Jeremiah, why do you see this?

God's people have forgotten who they are.

Jeremiah, what do you see?

I see mountains quaking,

I see empty skies with no birds anywhere,

I see ruins where there once were cities.

Jeremiah, why do you see this?

God's people have forgotten who they are,

And now it is time for them to remember.

Jeremiah reminded people long ago of what they had forgotten.

Jeremiah's words remind us of what we forget.

When lands turn barren,

when skies are empty of wings,

when cities become ruins:

we have forgotten that we are God's people.

(silence for reflection)

It is time for us to remember. Amen.

Words of Affirmation - Based on Philippians 2:15–16

Many years after Jeremiah, Paul – a follower of Jesus – tried to help people remember.

Paul, what are you writing?

A letter to God's people.

Paul, what do you say to them?

I tell them to hold fast to God's word of life,

that they might shine like bright stars in the sky.

We will hold fast to God's word of life. We will remember that we are God's people.

And may you each shine like a bright star in the sky. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 21 September 2021, p.49

Listen - The Circle Of God (Seasons 9-14)

This song is on the video along with some images. If you aren't able to access the video, perhaps you could reflect on the words and images they evoke...

Each blade of grass, ev'ry wing that soars,
the waves that sweep across a distant shore,

make full the circle of God.
Each laughing child, ev'ry gentle eye,
a forest lit beneath a moon-bright sky,
make full the circle of God.

Each silent paw, ev'ry rounded stone,
the buzz that echoes from a honey'd comb,
make full the circle of God.
Each fire-brimmed star, ev'ry outstretched hand,
the wind that leaps and sails across the land,
make full the circle of God.

Each icy peak, ev'ry patterned shell,
the joyous chorus that the dawn foretells,
make full the circle of God.
Each cosmic hue, ev'ry creature's way,
all form the beauty of this vast array,
making full the circle of God.

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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Mark 9:30-37

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' ³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

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

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Creator God, you desire to be in relationship with us, and for us to be awestruck by your beauty. May our attention move upward and outward to notice you and your handiwork in the sky, in the stars, and in the warmth of the sun. May we be reminded that you delight in all of creation and speak beyond words. Guide us to respond and to be claimed by wonder, connection, to you and each other. Amen.

This is the beginning of Jesus' intentional journey to Jerusalem.

Last week, in Mark 8, we heard Jesus ask the question: "Who do you say I am?"

And he tells them they must be prepared to take up their cross, be prepared for the reality that following in Jesus' footsteps would take them into suffering.

In the intervening verses, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain where they experience his transfiguration - that amazing sight of Jesus shining with the glory of God and speaking with Moses and Elijah.

And so now, soon after, Jesus continues to talk to them about betrayal, death and being raised. And rather than ask questions (9:32), they stay silent and then start arguing amongst themselves about who is the greatest (9:34). They know that their conversation bears little resemblance to the teaching Jesus has shared with them, they know that, in fact, their conversation is almost the opposite to what Jesus has been saying to them. So little wonder they weren't really wanting to tell him what had been going on (9:34).

So Jesus gives them two things to think about - "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." (9:35)

Servants and slaves in Jesus' time occupied the lowest ranks of society - they had no status apart from their owners; they could be bought and sold at any time.

So Jesus turns the idea of status, who is the greatest?, on its head.

If you really want to be great, then you need to become like the very people you ignore, overlook and take for granted.

If you want to be great, then you need to relinquish all your so-called "rights" and commit yourself to serving others. And to take it another step, our discipleship needs to be about more than hanging out with people who have no status; we need to be about serving them, attending to them, holding and embracing them.

And, the second thing Jesus says builds on this. While holding a small child in his arms, he says, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." (9:37)

Again, children had no status, they were not consulted about anything. At one time, we used to say that children should be "seen but not heard". In Jesus' culture, it was more like "not even seen". So, to welcome a child, to embrace a child, to hold a child in the midst of a gathering, is to welcome Jesus, to welcome God. Rather than suggesting that the child interrupts our engagement with God, our prayer or our worship, the child in our midst names God in our midst. Rather than being thought of as an inconvenience, a disruption or an interruption, welcoming a child, a seeker, someone who is vulnerable, in the midst of our gathering names and holds the presence of God.

Look to the skies - and see the expansive, boundless creativity of God.

Look to the skies - and see the pinpricks of light, God's love for every, single, soul - especially the last and the least.

Look to the skies - look with your heart, look with your spirit - hear the shouts for joy and the cries of anguish - both are there - ready for your embrace and response.

Responding

Affirmation of Faith

Let us affirm our faith together.

We believe that God creates all things,
renews all things and celebrates all things.

We believe Earth is a sanctuary,
a sacred planet filled with God's presence,
a home for us to share with our kin.

We believe that God became flesh and blood,
became a piece of Earth,
a human being called Jesus Christ,
who lived and breathed and spoke among us,
suffered and died on a cross,
for all human beings and for all creation.

We believe that the risen Jesus
is the Christ at the core of creation
reconciling all things to God,
renewing all creation and filling the cosmos.

We believe the Spirit renews life in creation
groans in empathy with a suffering creation,
and waits with us for the rebirth of creation.

We believe that with Christ we will rise
and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation. Amen

Listen - Called By Earth and Sky

This song is on the video along with some images. If you aren't able to access the video, perhaps you could reflect on the words and images they evoke...

*Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.*

Precious these waters, endlessness,
deep ocean's dreams.
Waters of healing, rivers of rain,
the wash of love again.
Called by earth and sky...

Precious this gift, the air we breathe,
wind born and free.
Breath of the Spirit blow through this place,
our gath'ring and our grace.
Called by earth and sky...

Precious these mountains, ancient sands,
vast, fragile land.
Seeds of our wak'ning, rooted and strong,
creation's faithful song.
Called by earth and sky...

Precious the fire that lights the way,
bright the dawning day.

Fire of passion, sorrows undone,
our faith and justice one.
Called by earth and sky...

*Words and Music © Pat Mayberry SOCAN
Seasons of the Spirit 6-12*

Prayers of the People - Narelle Dempster

Loving God, you are the one whose grace is sufficient for all our needs and whose very presence is our strength in times of weakness. Still our hearts and prepare us as we bring our concerns before you. In so doing, we take hold of your promise with confidence that when we boldly approach your throne of grace we will find mercy and grace in time of need.

We speak to you of our concern for people and places in our world and our community that need your help.

We hold before you people and situations you've laid on our hearts - friends, family and communities that are, hurting, grieving, lonely; unemployed, those struggling with disabilities, fighting terminal illness, others in despair from broken relationships, some grieving a death, many caught up in circumstances for which there seems no obvious answer.

For those impacted by lockdown - physically, emotionally and financially.
Lord we ask for your peace to comfort them in the midst of their torment.
Breathe into their lives and heal them.

We're thankful for the vaccine and the difference it will make, but the ways that it will be used in the name of freedom raises challenging questions for how we might respond. We pray for wisdom and gentleness to demonstrate your love in these difficult times, such that grace and mercy might prevail over politics and fear.

Lord, we continue to seek you as your followers, for how you are leading us and shaping us to be a people of hope and connection, both physically and emotionally. We look forward to the day when we can gather again in person to share and rejoice with each other.

In your name and by your grace we pray. Amen

Creation Prayer

Jesus Christ, teach us to empathise with Earth.
Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation,
cries for justice from the air, the clouds and the sky.
Jesus Christ, make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit
in creation, groans of longing for a new creation.
Jesus Christ, make our hearts sensitive to the songs of our kin,
songs of celebration from the stars, the rains and the light.
Christ, teach us to care. Amen

Offering

*Take a moment to reflect on God's goodness to us, to you.
What of your resources - time, skills, money etc - can you offer for the sharing of God's love in the world? How can you make better use of the resources entrusted to your care?*

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.

God, our provider, we take from you and at this time we return to you out of Your generosity. Accept from us our offerings of time, energy, prayer and money that they may all be used to share Your grace and peace, mercy and goodness as we reach out into Your world. Amen

Sending

Song: Guide me O thou great Redeemer (*Together in Song 569*)

<https://youtu.be/5j48TLIRb4Q>

Sending

Christ calls you to be his disciples,
to serve him with love and compassion,
to serve Earth by caring for creation,
especially the atmosphere above
that gives breath to all creatures of Earth.

We will celebrate the winds!

We will plead for creation!

We will flood the sky with prayers!

Will you care for creation?

We will care for creation!

We will nurture our planet!

We will celebrate with the sky!

Blessing

May the Spirit of God, who is above all and in all and through all,
fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in sky and Earth
and the pulsing of Christ within you.

Go in peace!

Serving Christ and loving Earth!

We go in peace,

serving Christ and loving Earth.

Rev Kath Merrifield and Meredith Yabsley

19 September 2021

Unless otherwise noted, this material is drawn and adapted from a series created by the Synod of VicTas for the 2021 Season of Creation: <https://seasonofcreation.com/>

