

The Mountains

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/613393061/82136ec626>*

A Gathering Space

I wonder what time of day or night you might be reading or watching? We often encourage you to make this time holy, to make this space holy, remembering that holy means set apart. You may like to light a candle and place it near the stones, symbols or words you may have collected during this Season of Creation.

Acknowledgement of Country

From the flat top of Saddleback, to the roaring of the blowhole, down valleys of flame trees and cedar, meandering through the swamp to river mouth and island; these lands have been home to the Wadi Wadi people of the Dharawal nation; we acknowledge their elders, past, present and emerging and we ask God's blessing on them.

The Mountain – vimeo.com/22439234 (included in the worship video)

Call to Worship

Simple Sabbath
Sometimes grandeur is great –
mountains and sunsets
and oceans and such...
But sometimes
all I need is simplicity –
a wildflower,
a birdsong,
a bit of blue sky,

my feet connected to
the good earth,
the colour green,
not much to do,
someone to sit with,
a cup of coffee,
a prayer on the breeze –
simple sabbath gifts
to fill my soul and
remind me that
ordinary, everyday
moments are
holy too.

(Source: Wendy Janzen)

Sing – How lovely on the mountains

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IHBEIWZ9k4 (included in the worship video)
– *the words might be different to what you expect...*

1. How lovely on the mountains are
the feet of Him

Who brings good news, good
news.

Announcing peace
Proclaiming news of happiness
Our God reigns our God reigns
Our God reigns our God reigns
Our God reigns our God reigns

2. You watchmen lift your voices
joyfully as one
Shout for your King, your King
See eye to eye the Lord restoring
Zion
Your God reigns, your God reigns!

3. Waste places of Jerusalem
break forth with joy
We are redeemed, redeemed
The Lord has saved and comforted
His people
Your God reigns, your God reigns!

4. Ends of the earth, see the
salvation of your God
Jesus is Lord, is Lord
Before the nations He has bared
His holy arm
Your God reigns, your God reigns!

Pray of Confession

In our day, the earth cries out:

“Can no one see this destruction?”

In our day, the poor cry out:

“Can no one see this hunger?”

In our day, the victims of war cry out:

“Can no one see this violence?”

In our day, the refugees of the climate crisis cry out:

“Can no one see our struggle to survive?”

In our day, those most vulnerable cry out:

“Can no one see this fear?”

We acknowledge our choice to turn away.

(silence for reflection)

Words of Affirmation

God's love for us is without limit.

God's call to us is unending.

Surrounded by God's grace,
we hear the call to help create a new day:
a day where no one shall hurt or destroy in all this
holy creation.

***We will open our eyes to see, our hearts to care,
and our lives to shape this vision. Amen.***

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Reflection on the Mountains 1

Our third week of the Season of Creation brings us to the mountains

Mountain

['mount(e)n]

Noun.

a large natural elevation of the earth's surface rising abruptly from the surrounding level; a large steep hill.

a large amount of something; 'a mountain of work'

Origin.

Middle English: from Old French montaigne, based on Latin mons, mont- 'mountain'

Mountains help create the geographical features of the landscape, sometimes they present a physical barrier that prevents travel – the Blue Mountains were the barrier between the coast and the dream – were there vast green plains of grass like England just beyond the ranges?

We see climbing a mountain as a physical challenge, it gives a sense of achievement and satisfaction overcoming the difficulties, making it to the top. From the top of the mountain you can see further, get a different perspective on what's around you. A mountain is stable, not moving, substantial, something you can count on, a landmark to guide you.

Mountains are often given a spiritual identity...

Cultures across the world have looked up to the mountains as the place to connect with the divine, after all if heaven is the spiritual realm, then going up a high mountain must bring people closer to the gods. Many indigenous cultures include features of the landscape as part of their creation stories. For the Yuin nation here on the Far South Coast, Gulaga is their mother, lying on her side watching over her children, the mountains and islands and still watching over them today.

One day Gulaga and her two sons, Baranguba and Najanuga, were collecting bush tucker. When Baranguba asked if he could go fishing, Gulaga said, 'No, you're too young, you're to stay next to me'.

As they walked along, Baranguba insisted that he go fishing. But Gulaga said, 'No, no, you have to stay next to me, it's not safe to go fishing by yourself'. But Baranguba snuck away. He made himself a canoe and he rowed out to sea, where a big wave came and washed him off the canoe ... He laid down in the water — and that's where he still lives today.

When Najanuga, the younger son, saw this, he wanted to move away and set up his own camp. But Gulaga said, 'No, you're too young, you just sit here right next to me'.

So now she lies there, looking out at the sea at her older son, with her younger son right next to her, in arm's reach. (Cheryl Davidson, Yui people)

We see mountains as a metaphor for our human experience; something that is out of our reach, too hard, too far, impossible; we speak of mountain top experiences and go on pilgrimages seeking something deeper, something more from our relationship with God and as we read the scriptures we find these same ideas. His holy mountain; a place nations will turn to; a place where things will be complete; as God intended. Let's hear some of those words now.

Reading: Isaiah 11:1-9

- A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- ² The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
- ³ His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
- ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
- ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
- ⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
- ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
- ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25

- ¹⁷ For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
- ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
- ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.

²⁰ No more shall there be in it
 an infant that lives but a few days,
 or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
 for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
 and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them;
 they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
²² They shall not build and another inhabit;
 they shall not plant and another eat;
 for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
 and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
²³ They shall not labour in vain,
 or bear children for calamity;
 for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
 and their descendants as well.
²⁴ Before they call I will answer,
 while they are yet speaking I will hear.
²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
 the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
 but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
 They shall not hurt or destroy
 on all my holy mountain,
 says the Lord.

Reading: Psalm 48

¹ Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised
 in the city of our God.
 His holy mountain, ²beautiful in elevation,
 is the joy of all the earth,
 Mount Zion, in the far north,
 the city of the great King.
³ Within its citadels God
 has shown himself a sure defence.

⁹ We ponder your steadfast love, O God,
 in the midst of your temple.
¹⁰ Your name, O God, like your praise,
 reaches to the ends of the earth.
 Your right hand is filled with victory.
¹¹ Let Mount Zion be glad,
 let the towns of Judah rejoice
 because of your judgements.
¹² Walk about Zion, go all around it,
 count its towers,
¹³ consider well its ramparts;
 go through its citadels,
 that you may tell the next generation
¹⁴ that this is God,
 our God for ever and ever.
 He will be our guide for ever.

Reading: Psalm 121

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
⁴ He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
⁵ The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
⁸ The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.

Reading: Mark 9:2-10

Here we read the account of a mountain top experience for the disciples:

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

Reflecting on the Mountains 2

So let's think for a few minutes about how our own stories connect with the mountains...

One commentator writes:

The ark of safety, surviving the great flood which covered the world, comes to rest on the mountains of Ararat. The first signs of earth's renewed life come from the slopes of those peaks. And when old Jacob knew it was time to speak a good word over his sons, he told his beloved Joseph that all the blessings and gifts of the age-old mountains would surely rest on the head of this prince among his brothers.

The Bible's poetry delights in going into great detail on God and the mountains. Eagles make their homes on rocky crags, perched there scanning far and wide for food. But birds of prey are not the only ones watching. God has his eye on the high places too, and he sees the mountain goats give birth, and the doe bearing her fawn. He knows every bird across the ranges, and even the insects are his. He is working always to make sure all of it—land, sky, peaks, clouds, rain, plants, and yes, the insects—works together for the flourishing of life.

Glenn Paawu <https://instituteforbiblereading.org/story-of-the-bible-told-by-mountains/>

We're living in a time that calls us to be aware of the mountains in more than one way – I'd like to just think for a few minutes about mountains from three perspectives – physical, social, and spiritual.

As we think about the Season of Creation there is the challenge for us to be aware of the world around us, its power and its fragility. The huge, awesome power of the eagle and the recognition that we, as human beings have a responsibility to learn and act to protect and nurture that wild beauty. And that is happening in little ways as we see numbats, burrowing bettongs and brush-tailed bettongs being reintroduced into areas where they seemed to be extinct not long ago; people diving in Sydney Harbour, not for recreation but to gather the plastics and rubbish out of our waterways; multi-national corporations deliberately choosing renewable energy sources; even as we take a carry bag into the shop or make sure we recycle soft plastics – it is happening, but, forgive the pun, there's mountains of work still to do.

Story of reclaimed tip...

Twenty years after closing the Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island, New York, USA, its mountains of trash have been transformed into green hills covered with native grasses. The transformation of what was once the world's largest landfill is remarkable considering our overconsumption and the astounding rate at which we continue to create waste. But Fresh Kills Landfill is now Freshkills Park, home to restored marshes, grasslands, and migrating birds. Even as parts of our planet are in peril, new life is forming. God is always doing something new. God is always creating.

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As we look around we recognise the great challenges of the times we are living in and the impact that is having on you and I, on our neighbours, our families, the children who are growing up in an uncertain world. Many of us and many of those we know are facing mountains, insurmountable obstacles – jobs gone, a lifetimes work lost, grief and separation, illness and death, and for many just the daily grind of these four empty walls or these four crowded and tension filled walls. How can we make a difference in our world? What are the little ways we can encourage one another, support our community, be a word of hope? How can we as a faith community become a landmark that gives people direction?

And it is happening in little ways. Every time Janice picks up a box of groceries, every beanie, every cactus sold over the front fence, every dahlia bulb shared; when you pick up the phone and call someone or you send one of those free Australia Post postcards; when you take the time to read some of the many resources that help us understand suicide, the issues around domestic and family violence or what Reconciliation really means; just being a good listener- two ears and one mouth- people desperately need someone to just HEAR their story, not judge it, not tell them how to fix it, just be a basket to hold the story.

There's something that draws us to mountains, even though mountains come with challenges and difficulties and require something of us if we are to reach the top, but somehow we know that the journey, the struggle, the rough parts, will be worth it. Are there times in your life where you have faced a mountain? What was it that kept you going, guided your steps? Often we move on and don't stop to recognise

that way that our faith has grown in those difficult times. Where has the Spirit touched your heart – passages of scripture, words of hymns, beautiful music, art or poetry – have you felt the Spirit move as you immersed yourself in nature. We are not physical beings who occasionally have spiritual experiences, we are spiritual beings with physical bodies. The three aspects of the mountains are all intrinsically connected – our physical experiences, our social interactions and our spiritual growth.

I really liked that image of the traditional weaving from a couple of weeks ago. Taking the raw material of our lives, bringing together the strands of our experience, our struggles, our joys, the things we have come to know about who God is and who we are and weaving all of that with our prayers and the Holy Spirit's help into something God can use, a basket to hold someone's story, a carry bag to help share the load, a mat for someone to rest on, a blanket to bring comfort and warmth.

My prayer is that this week you will experience the reality of God in your life, in your days and nights, but more than that, that you will be the reality of God in someone else's life.

Bringing Ourselves

Loving God You have given all to us, with grateful hearts we come bringing something to show our love and gratitude, we come bringing ourselves. Amen.

Sing - Hear Our Praises

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5jYodXiMm8> (included in the worship video_

May our homes be filled with
dancing
May our streets be filled with joy
May injustice bow to Jesus
As the people turn and pray

*From the mountains to the valley
Hear our praises rise to You
From the heavens to the nations
Hear our singing fill the air*

May our light shine in the darkness
As we walk before the cross
May Your glory fill the whole earth
As the water over the seas
From the mountains...

Bridge:
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
(repeat)
From the mountains...

Reuben Morgan, Hillsong

Prayers of the People

Like the steep face of a snowy peak,
your mystery brings us
to a place of wonder and stillness.
As we quiet our hearts,
hear our prayers, God of all creation.

Like the beauty of sun and cloud,
playing with rocky heights,
your gifts fill us with grace.
As our hearts respond with gratitude,

hear our prayers, God of all creation.

Like turbulent storms
that dash against high ridges and cliffs,
our days – or the days of those we know –
can be chaotic and challenging.
As our hearts hold these concerns,
hear our prayers, God of all creation.

Like the view from a summit,
you remind us to hold on
to visions and dreams larger than ourselves.
As our hearts dream these possibilities,
hear our prayers, God of all creation.

Benediction

As we go into this week, may we keep our eyes ever upward to see the beauty and majesty of this world our God has created and by the power of the Holy Spirit may we be ready to climb the path, reaching out to help others along the way.

Just in case you want to find out more about some of the mountains mentioned in the Bible...

Ararat – Noah's ark

Sinai or Horeb – Moses and the children of Israel

Gerizim – Jesus and the Samaritan woman

Mount of Olives – Jesus Passion begins

Nebo- a view of the promised land, Moses buried here by God

Moriah- Abraham sacrificed Isaac

Zion – Solomon builds the Temple

Tabor - transfiguration

Carmel – Elijah meets God

Eremos – sermon on the mount, the beatitudes

Marion Haigh
26 September 2021