

God of Possibilities

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".

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/626974161/b9c88e5dbd>



https://www.wingsforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/1400_possibility.jpg

Introduction

Today we sit with Job, deep in the depths of despair, desperately wanting to find God. God's seeming absence doesn't dissuade Job from shouting to God and bringing his grievances to God (23:4). We are invited to know God's presence even in the darkness of our own despair.

And we join with Jesus and the disciples, continuing Jesus' teaching about the demands of discipleship, encountering a rich man who is seeking God's kingdom, and confronted by our own wealth and privilege. The good news is that God is the God of possibilities - "for God, all things are possible", says Jesus.

Where are you at right now? Darkness or despair, joy or hope, wondering whether God's way will ever be our reality? The good news is that God is the God of possibilities - "for God, all things are possible".

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

From Psalm 22:

- ³ [God] you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- ⁴ In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- ⁵ To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

Let us pray,
God, if you are there at all,
you are greater and wiser and more generous than we can ever comprehend.
You deserve the best of everything that we have to give:
our deepest love;
our hardest questions;
our most stubborn perseverance;
our most effervescent joy;
our bitterest sorrow;
our frankest honesty;
our truest integrity;
our wettest tears;
our heartiest laughter.

These gifts matter, so as we pause in this time of worship, we promise always to do our best to bring all of ourselves: the good and the tough; our riches and our poverty; our strength and our weakness. May we find you here, and in every moment of our days.
Amen.

Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 40, p.67

Sing: Gather Us In (*Together in Song 474*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar0BXa82F9M>

Here in this place new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away,
see, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,
brought here to you in the light of this day.

Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;
gather us in, the blind and the lame;
call to us now, and we shall awaken,
we shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery;
we are the old, who yearn for your face;
we have been sung throughout all of history,
called to be light to the whole human race.

Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,
gather us in, the proud and the strong;
give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song.

Here we will take the wine and the water,
here we will take the bread of new birth,
here you shall call your sons and your daughters,
call us anew to be salt of the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
give us to eat the bread that is you;
nourish us well and teach us to fashion lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven light years away,
but here in this space, the new light is shining,
now is the kingdom, now is the day.
Gather us in, and hold us forever;
gather us in, and make us your own;
gather us in, all peoples together,
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

© Marty Haugen

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God,
we come into your presence...
not really knowing what that means, or how it is supposed to feel.

There should be a sense of awe, surely,
but is it a spine-tingling tremor of anticipation or the trembling dread of fear?

And what if there is none of that...

if it just feels ordinary and
comfortable to be here?

Is that a sign of being comfortable and intimate in our relationship with you,
or a sign that none of it is real?

We do not know how it should be,
so all we can do is to tell you how it is—
and perhaps that is all you wanted all along... for us to be honest,
and to come as we are.

So here we are, perplexing God, some comfortable, some fearful, some confident in our
faith, many less so that we were.

We come with our praises, and our prayers, with our questions, yes, and our complaints.

There are some faults
which we are happy to confess;
we know we are not perfect,
but not everything wrong is down to us, and it feels sometimes as though we are given
all the blame, and that's not fair. So much is wrong, dear God,
and that is hard to understand
if you are in control.

There, we've said it, Lord,
and we are still here. Is it OK?
Are you still there?
You surely cannot be angry with us
for being honest.
Are you wondering, perhaps,
why it has taken so long for us to tell you what you already knew...
why we are so hesitant to trust in your love?

Eternal God,
let the thinking stop now,
let the flow of words be still,
as we rest in your presence and allow your spirit to heal us, body, mind and soul.

Pause

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 40, p.67

Listen - Illuminate the Shadows (The Porter's Gate) [see video]

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Job 23:1-9, 16-17

Then Job answered:

- ² 'Today also my complaint is bitter;
his hand is heavy despite my groaning.
- ³ O that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his dwelling!
- ⁴ I would lay my case before him,
and fill my mouth with arguments.

- ⁵ I would learn what he would answer me,
and understand what he would say to me.
- ⁶ Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?
No; but he would give heed to me.
- ⁷ There an upright person could reason with him,
and I should be acquitted for ever by my judge.
- ⁸ 'If I go forward, he is not there;
or backward, I cannot perceive him;
- ⁹ on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;
I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.
- ¹⁶ God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;
- ¹⁷ If only I could vanish in darkness,
and thick darkness would cover my face!

Reading: Mark 10:17-31

¹⁷ As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' ¹⁸Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother." ' ²⁰He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' ²¹Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' ²⁴And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' ²⁶They were greatly astounded and said to one another, 'Then who can be saved?' ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.'

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' ²⁹Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'

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

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Loving God, May we trust in your love and respond to your presence, even when your call cuts against our expectations or plans. Open us to compassion that seeks your way of love, justice, inclusion, and equality for all. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, resources for 10 October 2021, p.82

Today's readings invite us into places we don't often go, especially not publicly. They take us, with Job, into the bleakest places of the human condition, and challenge us with our own reality of wealth and privilege and discipleship.

Today (10 October) is world mental health day. For anyone who has lived with depression or grief or trauma, it is not hard to identify with Job wanting to cover his face and hide in the darkness.

Job had been a wealthy man with a large family but now he has lost everything - his wealth, his family, and his health. His three friends gather around him and attempt to comfort him - much of the book is a record of the conversations between Job and his friends with the occasional intervention by God.

Today's reading is Job's response to Eliphaz trying to tell Job why he is in the situation he is in and what he should do about it. According to Eliphaz (in chapter 22), Job is a sinner and deserves God's punishment - if he "returns to God" (22:23) all will be well. I'm not sure how comforting that really is, particularly since, remember, Job is said to have been a good man - "blameless and upright" (1:1).

And Job recognise this type of God-talk for what it is - not helpful. Job responds (in chapter 23) by pretty much ignoring his friend's advice and railing against God. Even though he can't see or feel or find God anywhere, Job clings on, calling on God, expecting God to respond. And the end of the passage, in the silence, we see Job deep in despair - in darkness...

Have you ever been in that place?

Do you know someone who has been or is in that place?

It is a tough place to be. It hurts - emotionally, spiritually, sometimes physically. Sometimes we find ourselves there after grief or trauma - but sometimes we find ourselves there for no particular reason except that the general burdens of life are weighing us down or when our hopes and dreams or expectations of the world, of ourselves, or even of God, seem to be a long way from our human experience.

St John of the Cross called it the "dark night of the soul".

[Elie Weisel is another who describes this darkness of human experience.]

Job's experience, invites us to consider that the life of faith holds the breadth of human experience as sacred - not just the good stuff, not just the times when we prosper and are doing well, but also the times when we hit rock bottom - and everything in between. Faith is holding on when the our human experience, particularly the difficult bits and the bits that hurt us deeply, don't line up with our expectations or assumptions about who God is and what God is doing in the world.

Faith doesn't need to explain or offer solutions for our suffering or trials or disappointments, rather it is the framework with which is start to make sense of the full range of human experience: the highs and lows, the joys and the bleakest and darkest moments.

Faith tells us that even when we cannot see or feel or hear God for ourselves, God is with us, God in Christ has shared our human experience, understands what we are experiencing and remains with us - always.

Holding on to faith is not an answer or explanation, but a joining with a people who worship God - God who is "I Am" - God who is; a people who understand God is God and we are not; a people who understand God's relationship with the world is characterised by a form of justice that is shown to us in God raising God's son from death.

It is the hope of resurrection that comes out of the darkest of places, even death.

It is the assurance that even when the world shows everything to the contrary, Love prevails.

And it is these people, the people with whom we share this understanding, people of faith who make up the church, who will, at times, if we let them, if we allow each other, hold the light for us in the times we are unable to hold or even see it for ourselves.

I can imagine that the man who comes to Jesus asking what he needs to do to inherit eternal life has figured out that there is something to life he is missing. "Eternal life" for the Jewish people is akin to the presence of God, it is the coming of God's way in the world. This man has discovered that the wealth he has accumulated, nor his keeping of the law, has not brought the fulfilment he hoped it would. So he comes to Jesus seeking a solution - what must I do?, he asks (10:17).

But it is not about what he needs to do, is it?

It is about where he finds his security, where he places his trust.

In his case, when Jesus tells him to sell everything and give it to the poor, the man leaves in shock and grief (10:22).

How hard is it for us to separate ourselves from the things we think give us security - particularly our wealth and property? How entrenched in our lives, in the church, in our nation, is the idea that we need to protect our own space and resources before we consider the needs of the poor. During the week, I participated in the 50th Anniversary celebrations for Tearfund, an organisation I worked for before I came into ministry. It changed my life. One of the statistics given was that while the wealthy nations of the world had vaccinated significant portions of their populations, some over 90%, by the middle of last month, of the 5.7 billion Covid-19 vaccines administered globally, only 2% of those vaccines had been administered in Africa.¹ This is not due to a lack of expertise or capacity but because the wealthier nations have "hoovered" up supplies of the vaccines for themselves.

In Mark's account of this encounter with the rich man, he adds this part about Jesus acknowledging that this journey, this commitment to follow the way God intends for us, the way Jesus shows us, it is hard - but it is not impossible (10:23-27).

If we rely on ourselves, on our own resources, on our own wisdom and wealth, we will flounder.

But God is God - and all things are possible for God.

The rich man teaches us that we cannot treat Jesus' teaching as merely a matter of social ethics or even law (as the Jewish people understood it) or dogma or doctrine (as we might describe it today). There is much, much more at stake here.

The commitment to follow Jesus is not just about doing the right thing or leading a good life, it is about embracing the vision of who God is - the God who reveals Godself in the life, teaching, healing, death and resurrection of Jesus - and committing to live out that vision in all that we do, all that we say, and all that we are.

Hard? Absolutely. Especially when we try to do it by ourselves. And even when things seem to be going well, it is entirely possible that we will find ourselves suffering, grieving, our own losses or the disconnect between what we hope for and the reality we experience.

But, we join with the disciples of Jesus who affirm that "for God all things are possible".

We join with people of faith everywhere who know that God is God.

And our faith is about celebrating and embodying a vision for the world that prioritises love and justice over suspicion and power, that calls the world to hope and

¹ United Nations News, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099872>

transformation, that believes fundamentally that we can, in God's strength, build communities that reflect the way of Jesus.

And it is about holding on even when it feels like God has abandoned us, yelling at God if we need to, yet continuing to join with our brothers and sisters as we affirm the God whose love and grace is revealed to us in the life of Jesus and in his death and resurrection.

The call to discipleship is, at its heart, not about piety, religious practices, or even morality. It is following Jesus wholly and fully. The call to discipleship is not only about what is given up, but also what is embraced. In response to Peter's observation that the disciples have done exactly what Jesus asks of the man, Jesus paints a picture of the community of discipleship. It is a community of abundance and security, and, sadly for the community of Mark's gospel and many believers today, persecution. The community of discipleship is also the place where followers of Jesus find the one thing the rich man came looking for but was unwilling to risk all to gain. The question that began the conversation is not about an afterlife in heaven, but about living in the new reality that God was about to bring to bear on Earth. The Jews had longed for a day they knew was coming – a time when God's realm would be present on Earth; they called this the Age to Come. It is life in this age the person wants to inherit and seeks to know how.

We are invited to live into the reign of God with all its joys and risks. What does such following ask of us, individually and as a church? What are the hard questions of discipleship?

Seasons of the Spirit, resources for 10 October 2021, p.82

Let's pray,

God of good times and tough, remain with us as we wrestle with the call to be your people, and disciples of Jesus Christ.

Give us courage to be the people you call us to be - people of love, justice, mercy and grace; people who care for one another and share our resources willingly with people in need. May we always be present with our brothers and sisters who suffer - physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. May we be faithful companions in all the vagaries of life. Amen.

Responding

Listen - Living My Life For You (NCYC Band, 2003) [see video]

Prayers of the People - Meredith Yabsley
(inspired by Mark 10:17-31)

God of infinite patience and wisdom, we come to you with so many things that claim our time, our energy, our resources, our very lives. Is this us?

One idolised wealth, another hungered for fame,
so we went sadly away.
One loved career, one the latest fashion,
and we went proudly away.

We are easily drawn away from serving you by the enticements of the world for wealth, ease, and comfort. Just like the young man in the scriptures, we are owned by our possessions, held captive by our treasures. Is this us?

One lived through her children, one lived for his farm,
so we went busily away.
One fed on the adulation of fans, sport was another's passion,
so we went impatiently away.

We look at the world in which there is so very much warfare and strife, anger and hatred, and we easily become overwhelmed by the needs and the stresses. Is this us?

One had the gambling lust, another's was sex,
so we went madly away.
One wanted to be waited on, one wanted to lie about,
so we went sluggishly away.

It is us, Lord. We ask that you help us to place our lives and our trust in you, knowing that with your help, many wonderful things can be accomplished which will provide hope and peace for others and ourselves. You continue to offer to us healing and hope.

We thank you that you offer us more of yourself, you offer us peace and companionship on this tough road, you offer us a vision of who you want us to be as followers of Jesus.

We think of those we know who struggle with life, with their health and with the world as they see it, too busy, too fast, too harsh, too much and pray your peace fall on them, as it does for us.

You seek to transform our lives from captivity to freedom in witness and service. Give us courage and strength to truly be your disciples. For we ask this in Jesus' Name. **Amen.**

~ from the **Ministry Matters** website. <http://www.ministrymatters.com/>
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Holy Communion

Please join us at 9.30am on Sunday 10 October for Communion via Zoom - either using the link:

<https://uca-nswact.zoom.us/j/93369011990?pwd=bnAxcVZEblkvU1lqRTcrT3B5WHVLUT09>

Or by phone: 02 8015 6011

Meeting ID: 933 6901 1990

Passcode: 893530

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.

Let us pray:

You have filled us with every good gift, O God. You call us to do the impossible: to offer all that we have and all that we are, giving of ourselves in order to follow your way. Loosen our grasp on our possessions, make us generous the way you are generous, and keep us close to you, wherever you are going. Amen.

Teri Peterson

<https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/10/05/worship-words-for-10-october-2021/>

Sending

Song: Let Us Talents And Tongues Employ (*Together in Song 537*)

Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy;
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe
again,*

pass the Word around: loaves abound!

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe

again,

pass the Word around: loaves abound!

Christ is able to make us one,
at the table he sets the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

Jesus lives again...

Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share;
God-Immanuel everywhere.

Jesus lives again...

© Frederik Herman Kaan

Sending

Go into the world in peace.

Hold fast to what is good and right and true.

Rejoice in the wonders of God's presence all around us.

Return no one evil for evil but love as you have been loved.

Dare to walk with the broken, the hurting, the grieving, the vulnerable for that is where God walks as well.

Go into the world in peace.

Melodie Long (adapted from a traditional blessing)

<https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/10/05/worship-words-for-10-october-2021/>

Blessing

May the love of God be your companion.

May the life of Christ be your inspiration.

And may the breath of the Spirit be the energy that brings you to life.

Rev Kath Merrifield

10 October 2021