

Learning From Experience

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/637757979/9ed30bc208>



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Acknowledgement of Country

Across the vast and beautiful land that is now called Australia, indigenous peoples have cared for the earth since time immemorial.

In this place, between the ocean and the mountains, the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have lived in harmony with the land and waters and its flora and fauna.

We give thanks for them and this place.

We pay our respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

And we pray that we will learn to walk together and to care for one another and this land in ways that honour our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Introduction

The image is of a broken bowl repaired with gold, a Japanese method called "kintsugi".

Today's readings invite us to reflect on what is rebuilt - when our lives are transformed by our experiences, whether those experiences are positive or come through deep struggle - what comes next?

Call to Worship

Psalm 34:

- ¹ I will always thank the LORD;
I will never stop praising God.
- ² I will praise God for what God has done;
may all who are oppressed listen and be glad!
- ³ Proclaim with me the LORD's greatness;
let us praise God's name together!

- ⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good.
Happy are they who find refuge in God.

Loving God,
open our eyes to see your world more clearly,
open our mouths to proclaim your praise,
open our hands and our hearts to fill the world with generosity that comes from you.
Amen.

Listen - Taste and See (As One Voice 67)

*Taste and see, O taste and see,
taste and see, the goodness of
God.*

*Taste and see, O taste and see,
taste and see, the goodness of
God.*

Glory, glory to God most high;
glory, blessing and praise!
With one voice, O people,
rejoice in our God,
who hears the cry of all in need.
Taste and see...

Who has fashioned the earth and
sky,
who created the deep;
who exalts the lowly
and sets the captives free,
who opens the door to all those
who seek.
Taste and see...

Oh, the love of God!
Become flesh of our flesh,
so that we might live in glory.
Taste and see...

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Prayer

Creator God,
all living things come from you,
each human being is made in your image,
and you love all of it.

Your majestic presence is seen in the skies above and the earth below.
Your gentle presence is found in a colourful butterfly or a buzzing bee.

Who are we to doubt you
or question how you choose to create and maintain life?

Who are we to demand answers to questions we cannot understand?

And yet you have compassion on our doubts and invite our questions.
You desire to reveal yourself to us in nature, in people and through your word.
You long for us to see you and be aware of your presence.

Oh that we would learn to pay attention and come to an awareness
of your presence in all things.

We who are but dust, fragile and riddled with faults and failings,
yet still you love us.

Oh that we would learn to be open
and receive all you long to share with us.

Oh that we would talk with you all day and night, never tiring of all you want to tell us.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. Amen.

Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 40, p.87

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Then Job answered the Lord:

- ² 'I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
³ "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?"
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
⁴ "Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to me."
⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
⁶ therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.'

¹⁰ And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. ¹²The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. ¹³He also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶After this Job lived for one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. ¹⁷And Job died, old and full of days.

Reading: Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' ⁵²Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Loving God,

we come to you seeking healing, seeking new life, and seeking wholeness.

Help us to throw off the cloaks of our limited imaginations, that we might find ourselves forever in your presence. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 24 October 2021, p.108

It's a happy ending! And we all love a happy ending, don't we?!

After all that Job has been through, after losing his family and everything he has, after suffering from ill health, and after having those difficult conversations with his friends, seemingly he is restored to health and happiness with his family gathered around him. It is an almost fairytale-like picture.

Which makes it a bit of a contradiction, doesn't it?

There is nothing in what God says to Job, or what Job discovers about God, to indicate that this is where it will go. So we need to tread carefully before we accept this idyllic ending as the way God promises it always to be. Because we know, anyone who has experienced the kind of grief and trauma Job has been through knows, that this description, this "happy" ending, is simply not the whole story.

For many of us, this "happy ending" is not our experience - and as the story ends, we are no closer to explaining the suffering that Job has experienced, that we experience.

So we need to name the tension that exists in the text. And hopefully that tension points us to wonder and to avoid glib answers like "it will be alright in the end."

So what might we discover from what seems to be a less-than-satisfactory ending?

Perhaps verses 1-5 help us - Job sums up where he is at by acknowledging that God is God and that he will keep asking questions.

And then in verse 6, we have this curious statement: "therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes". Biblical scholars suggest a translation of the Hebrew word we have here as "despise" might be more like Job "relents" - he steps away from his defence - recognising that God is God. Job realises that it is not for him to try and control his experience of God in any way.

And then we have this narrative ending that reflects the opening of the story in Job 1, kind of wrapping around the ensuing dialogue involving Job and his friends and God. The ending described is almost hyperbole - over-the-top - Job is restored well beyond what he had been.

What do we do with that?

The exaggeration may be a way of saying this is one way the story could end...

It may also be a way of saying, after all this struggle, or perhaps as a trajectory of the struggle, life goes on - not in the same way as it did before - but life continues and part of that process is the rebuilding.

It is not as simple as Job lost everything and it is all given back to him. There is detail and a degree of symbolism in what Job has now (for example, the names of his daughters are very particular) that point us to something different.

So it is more like, Job went through this experience and, on the other side of this experience, life developed in this way.

So the question becomes what on earth was the experience about?

What have we learned?

What is the transformation that has been effected in between?

Importantly too, in the part our reading skipped over, restoration comes after Job prays for his friends - the ones who were particularly unhelpful - Job prays for them at God's direction and forgives them (vv7-9).

In the story we heard from Mark's gospel, we enter an encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus, a man who is blind. His blindness means that he is unable to work and he is not allowed to worship at the temple - we find him begging by the side of the road, hoping for a coin or the left-overs from someone passing by.

When he hears Jesus is approaching, he calls out - a bit like Job - loudly enough for everyone to hear and for the people around him to consider that he is being a bit of a nuisance.

More than that, he is shouting what, until now in Mark's gospel, has been kept relatively quiet - "Jesus, Son of David" - Jesus, of the Messianic line - "have mercy on me" (10:47-48).

When Jesus invites Bartimaeus to come to him, he throws off his cloak and leaps up (10:50). The cloak is likely one of very few possessions, the only thing that would keep him warm as he sat by the roadside - but it is abandoned in his haste to encounter Jesus.

Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" (10:51)

What a great question! Jesus doesn't assume what Bartimaeus wants, he asks.

"Teacher, let me see again." (10:52)

"Go, your faith has made you well." (10:53)

But Bartimaeus doesn't "go". The gospel writer tells us that he follows Jesus "on the way" (10:54).

Similarly as for Job, it is the easy way out to accept the "healing" of sight as the point to this story - and while it is an important part, that is not where the story ends.

The point of this story is not so much the healing, but the following, the discipleship:

Bartimaeus is unafraid to declare loudly who he believes Jesus to be. He cries out to Jesus, determined to meet him face-to-face. And in the meeting, comes seeing the world with new eyes and following the One who enables him.

As we reflect on the book of Job in its entirety, and as we consider the direction Bartimaeus' life takes, you might like to take some time to reflect on your own experiences of suffering and where God is in it all.

Have you, like Job, felt abandoned, excluded and wondered where God is?

Have you shouted at God, demanding answers?

Have you known the joy of friends who remind you of God's presence and love? For these friends, we give thanks. And we pray that if our friends are to endure grief, ill-health or hard times, we will be there with them to hold them and to remind them of God's love.

Have you known the frustration of friends who haven't been all that helpful? For these friends we offer forgiveness, we pray for them and we remain in relationship with them.

Have you known transformation - slow and painful like Job's or in a fleeting moment like Bartimaeus - or somewhere in between?

As many of us know, even when our physical or economic circumstances improve, we carry the scars of grief and trauma and sometimes ill-health into our future.

We begin to build a new life but we are marked by our experiences.

But have we done the hard work of wrestling with what we have learned from our experiences? How are we different? What have we learned about God in the messiness of life? And what wisdom might we now share with our friends and neighbours who might be struggling from time to time?

God, when others cry out, help us to stand still, listen and not turn them away. When we cry out to you, please help us to listen then, too, and rejoice in the answers you give.

Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 24 October 2021, p.106

Responding

Sing: Where The Spirit Is, There's Freedom (*Together In Song* 421)
Where the Spirit is there's freedom.
Where the Spirit is, there is life!

Not by the world can our freedom be nourished,
not by our things, only by Spirit.
Practise, my children, to live by the Spirit,
drop all your masks, take freedom's clothing!
Where the Spirit is there's freedom.
Where the Spirit is, there is life!

Heaven on earth, here we live free to
love and to share, carried by joy.
Practise, my children, to live by the Spirit,
daring today to taste God's future!
Where the Spirit is there's freedom.
Where the Spirit is, there is life!

Wounds will be healed, eyes will be opened,
imaging God, reflecting Jesus.
Practise, my children, to live by the Spirit,
heaven is here, time made eternal!
Where the Spirit is there's freedom.
Where the Spirit is, there is life!

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Prayers of the People - Marion Rattray

Loving, Gracious and Compassionate God,
You are with us at all times and know exactly what we are doing and thinking. We pray
that we will always turn to you in troubled times but also when things are going well and
we owe you praise.

In this pandemic we are experiencing the turmoil of masks, vaccinations, lockdowns, QR
codes and frightening numbers of those who are sick with covid or deaths. May we still
be able to reach out to you for your example and see Jesus in the eyes of our fellow
Australians who are suffering in some way.

We pray for people around the world who are suffering through war and violence - for the
people of Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Syria. May your peace be known in those places.

We pray for world leaders as they gather in Glasgow in a few days time to discuss their
commitment to working towards change for the sake of our planet. May your wisdom
and extravagant grace prevail - may those nations who are wealthy open their hearts to
those who are most struggling with the realities of climate change.

As we go about our daily lives, open our eyes to see the world as you see it.
Let us bring your hope and peace to the world, in Jesus name. 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.

We pray...

We hear the call of Jesus to rise;

we hear the call of Jesus to be well.

We hear the call of Jesus to follow; we hear the call of Jesus to care.

Bless these gifts, O God,

and bless the lives of those who give in your service to the world.

Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 24 October 2021, p.106

Sending

Song: Lord, Let Me See (*Together in Song* 681)

Lord let me see, see more and more,

see the beauty of a person, not the colour of the skin,

see the faces of the homeless with no-one to take them in,

see discouragement because she'll never win:

see the face of our Lord in the pain:

Lord let me see.

Lord let me hear, hear more and more,

hear the sounds of great rejoicing, hear a person barely sigh;

hear the ring of truth, and hollowness of those who live a lie;

hear the wail of starving people who will die;

hear the voice of our Lord in the cry:

Lord let me hear.

Lord let me care, care more and more,

care for those who feel the loneliness, for those who have no say,

care for friends who have no job and find it hard to face the day,

care for those with whom we sing and work and pray:

and in care Jesus Christ will be found:

Lord let me care.

Lord let me learn, learn more and more,

learn that what I know is just a speck of what there is to know;

learn from listening to my neighbour when I'd rather speak and go;

learn that as we live in faith and trust we grow;

learn to see, hear and care, with our Lord:

Lord let me learn.

Lord let me love, love more and more,

love the loveless and the fragile, help them be what they can be,

love the way that I would like them to be looking after me;

for to know you is to love them and be free,

and in love Jesus Christ will be found:

Lord let me love.

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Sending

Friends, cry out to be heard,
giving voice to yours and others' needs.
In all you say and do,
seek the kindness of Christ
and follow with your whole heart.
Be filled with Spirit
and be led into the daily challenges
of life by Spirit's rare and enduring beauty.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 24 October 21, p.110

Blessing

The One who created the heavens and the earth,
whose understanding knows no limits,
the One who invites honest questions
enquiring minds and open hearts,
bless you
in the ongoing adventure of life and faith,
now and forever. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 40, p.89

Rev Kath Merrifield
24 October 2021