

God Revealed - in Extravagance

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 the time of "Epiphany".*

Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

Acknowledgement of Country

Across this vast and beautiful land that is now called Australia, First Peoples 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.



Call to Worship

Psalm 36:5-10

- ⁵ Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
- ⁶ Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgements are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.
- ⁷ How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- ⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
- ⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light. **[Light candle]**
- ¹⁰ O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!

Let us pray...

God of grace, come amongst us now.

May your steadfast love wrap around us and all whom we love and care for.

Christ Jesus, as we enjoy your extravagant hospitality, help us to open our hearts and homes to share with others.

Spirit of Life, nudge us, prompt us, equip us that we may work for the good of all your peoples and enable the growing of your realm in our living. Amen.

Sing - Come O God Of All The Earth (Together In Song 181)

Come, O God of all the earth:
come to us O Righteous One;
come, and bring our love to birth:
in the glory of your Son.

Sing out, earth and skies!

*Sing of the God who loves you;
raise your joyful cries;
dance to the life around you.*

Come, O God of wind and flame:
fill the earth with righteousness;
teach us all to sing your name:
may our lives your love confess.

Sing out, earth and skies...

Come, O God of flashing light:
twinkling star and burning sun;
God of day and God of night:
in your light we all are one.

Sing out, earth and skies...

Come, O God of snow and rain:
shower down upon the earth;
come, O God of joy and pain:
God of sorrow, God of mirth.

Sing out, earth and skies...

Come, O Justice, come, O Peace:
come and shape our hearts anew;
come and make oppression cease:
bring us all to life in you.

Sing out, earth and skies...

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Prayer - Praise, Confession,

Extravagant God,

we praise you for more than abundant grace shared freely and without favour.

You are the God of abundant blessing, holding back no good thing.

Ever-hospitable One,

the storehouse of your love never runs dry.

We taste and see your goodness, overflowing,
spilling into our lives

and the life of the world—

love, grace, and mercy

enough for all,

and more besides.

Generous God,

forgive us when, in fear,

we withhold your grace,

worrying that there may not be enough to go around;

or, when we judge that others

may not be worthy of your blessing.

Forgive us when, in self-interest,

we share your grace

only with those 'like us'

and those who like us,

forgetting that all of humanity is our neighbour, and all are invited to your feast.

Fill us once more with your Spirit of generosity,
so that our lives overflow with your love;

may we be vessels of blessing
and messengers of mercy,
pouring out your abundance
to a thirsty world,
in need of a taste of heaven's wine. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 41, Resources for 16 January 2022, p.79

Words of Assurance

The good news is this:

When we are empty, God fills our soul.

When we are thirsty, God quenches our spirit.

When we are wondering whether we have reached the end of our rope, God breaks into our living and offers new hope and new life.

For this we are truly grateful!

Sing - Sing Of The Lord's Goodness (Together In Song 183)

Sing of the Lord's goodness,
Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us,
his love is forever,
faithful to the end of days.

*Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to
God.*

*Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

Courage in our darkness,
comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of God most high;
solace for the weary,
pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.

Come then, all you nations...

Praise him with your singing,
praise him with the trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp,
praise him with the cymbals,
praise him with your dancing,
praise God till the end of days.

Come then, all you nations...

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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues,

to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Reading: John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' ⁵His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' ⁶Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Generous God, as we open the Scriptures and reflect on the life of your son, Jesus, open our eyes and hearts to your signs. Give us a deeper understanding of who you are and who you have created us to be. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Have you ever been to a party where the food or beverages have run out?
As a guest, it is about that time we probably consider it polite to think about leaving.
If we are the host, usually it means a quick dash to the local corner shop to top up supplies.
But in Jesus' time there was no corner shop or 24 hour Dan Murphy's.
And a wedding often went for several days - where the wedding guests enjoyed the hospitality of the hosting family.
Remember: hospitality is a big thing in Jewish culture. It was and still is a central theme for how God is known and how God's people are to be known. For the Hebrew people, their hospitality was to reflect the hospitality of God. This was something that had been part of what set them apart from other cultures in the region from their beginnings as a people wondering in the desert. Time and again it appears as a central theme of the Hebrew Scriptures. Abraham offered hospitality to strangers, the prophets are constantly calling the people of Israel to share God's abundance and welcome.
So for the wine to run out early on was a big deal.

And perhaps if we consider this event in Jesus' life in the light of God's insistence that God's people be abundantly hospitable, it is not so surprising that Jesus turning water into wine is the first of the "signs" the writer of John's gospel records.

The first 12 chapters of John is referred to as the 'Book of signs'. Here are recorded 7 "signs":

- water into wine (2:1-11)
- healing an official's son (4:46-54)
- healing a paralytic (5:2-18)

- multiplying loaves and fishes (6:5-15)
- walking on water (6:16-21)
- healing a blind man (9:1-41)
- raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44)

And the author is at pains to remind us that these are just some of the many.

Abundant hospitality, healing, power over creation's forces, the power of life over death. It is important to remember that:

"The signs indicate not simply that Jesus has these miraculous powers, but that these powers point to his divine origin and his role as the revealer of God's words."

Elizabeth Raine and John Squires,
Journeying With John: an exploration of the Fourth Gospel and Revelation,
2014 (reprinted 2018), p.12

So what is the sign of changing water into wine telling us? What is it pointing us to?

First - it says something about God's call and timing, and the excuses we sometimes make to avoid acting. When approached by his mother who has noticed what has happened, Jesus responds to her, "why is it our problem? My hour has not yet come" (2:4). Not my problem, not my time. [show cartoon] How often do we close our eyes to the needs of others around us, hoping someone else will take care of them? How often do we try to convince ourselves that there is nothing we can do anyway?

Second - Jesus - whether convinced that he can and should help or reluctantly doing what his mother tells him to do - either way - he asks the kitchen staff to fill the containers used for ritual cleansing - and in so doing, he transforms religious practice, ritual washing, into celebration. Religious practice is always to be open to transformation - may we never get so firmly set in "the way things are done", that we are not open to the transformative presence of Christ in our midst

Then - we are reminded of God's extravagant abundance - the wine that is poured for the host is *good* wine and there is lots of it - what we offer to our neighbours, our guests, ought to be the best we can offer, and there is always enough [a theme that is reflected again in another of the signs when Jesus multiplies the loaves and fishes]. This is abundance beyond our expectations.

And finally, Jesus affirms the *value* of hospitality - by acting as he does, he ensures the celebration continues. He affirms the role of the host in offering hospitality that is generous, abundant and extravagant - again pointing to the nature of God's hospitality.

This event in Jesus' life is put alongside Paul's first letter to the Corinthians - let me paraphrase:

Let's be really clear, says Paul, it is God's Spirit working in us that enables us to say "Jesus is Lord" (12:3).

So if you have come to a point where you can say, "I may not understand all there is to understand about Jesus, but I have seen enough to want to follow his example and allow his teaching to guide my life", then you can be sure God's spirit is moving in and with you.

And Paul goes on to let us be sure that God's spirit endows each one of us with skills and gifting and talents which are to be used for the common good - things that we are each able to do, that will help everyone to grow and to flourish. In this letter, Paul names such things as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues (speaking and interpreting). In other letters, he names other things such as administration, teaching, generosity and practical care for others (Romans 12 and Ephesians 4).

The point is that each of us has something to offer that will help us all to grow and reflect the love and grace of God in the world. And just as God has gifted us in abundance and extravagant generosity, so we are called to offer what we have not just physically, but our gifts and skills and time resources, abundantly and extravagantly, to the people we encounter in our daily living.

May we keep our eyes and ears and hearts open to the people around us and alert to where we can offer ourselves.

Let us not be in denial of the need around us or of our ability to work together in ways that will enable us all to flourish.

In our hospitality, may God's hospitality be known, shared and celebrated.

Let us pray...

O God, your desire for creation is abundance.

Elevate our vision and give us faith broad and wide enough to see your plenty.

And give us courage to share what we have and who we are with our neighbours far and near. Amen.

Adapted from a prayer from Season of the Spirit, Resources for 16 Jan 22, p.124

Responding

Sing - One Body In Christ (Seasons of the Spirit 8-23)

*One Body in Christ
called to share the Good News with the
world.*

*Each of us gifted,
made in God's image,
we have a story to tell,
a story of love.*

We have been baptised in Christ,
the love of our God
poured into our hearts.
Called to share the mission of Christ,
the Spirit of God alive in our hearts;

to be a light of welcome
in the darkness of exclusion,
an out-stretched hand of love to ev'ryone.
We are one body in Christ...

To give voice to the voiceless,
the unheard in the wilderness,
an outstretched hand of love to ev'ryone.
We are one body in Christ...
(repeat chorus)

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Prayer for Others (Helen Laidlaw)

As we pray together, help us to submerge ourselves in the Spirit of our Creator, our Mother/Father God, and Jesus our Saviour.

I am so grateful for the life we lead here in Australia with pleasant climate, beautiful surroundings and safety. We are all anxious about Covid infection but we have also been fortunate to have the opportunity to be triple vaccinated, have great medical treatments and awareness of the symptoms. We have so many blessings which we take for granted.

I pray for those who have lost family and friends to Covid— all deaths are hard to bear. We pray for Val Best's family. But I also pray for those who have lost loved ones to other illnesses and suicide. It is so hard not to feel guilt – "Could I have done more?" Also the deaths in Queensland in floods are hard to accept, and all the other drownings this summer.

I particularly want to pray for all those who are disappointed by changes in their plans. We so often pray for things to happen our way, and forget that in the Lord's Prayer we pray "Let thy will be done". Help us to remember that God loves each of us and we must trust that His will is best, not ours.

I pray for the decisions of the New Year being made in this church, that they will encourage everyone to participate and use their unique talents. Help us to show appreciation to others even if their activities seem basic or simple. All are so necessary. There seems to be so much dissension in the different governments in our country with what appears to be lack of planning and anticipation of what is likely to be our next difficulty. Be with all those in powerful positions – and even in our new Kiama Council – that they heed the advice of the knowledgeable ones and act on it!

I pray for our world in turmoil – with people being gunned down for peacefully protesting in so many countries. Help us to be brave enough to refuse to sell armaments to these countries and in the negotiations between powerful nations, that your will is done.

We are a multicultural country but we are also racist. I pray for my Aboriginal friends that they are accepted, and lastly I beg for reassessment by the government of the plight of Refugees and asylum seekers who have been locked up for years – treated as criminals with no hope and no future. Make us more aware and active in helping to change this situation.

Your hand is always held out to us – help us to take it every day and do your will.
In Jesus name and with his love and sacrifice,
Amen

Offering

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7)

As we take this moment now, consider the gifts God has given you.

Own them, claim them.

Or pray that God will reveal them to you.

How will you use those gifts for the common good?

We pray...

Unstinting, generous,

always with us:

everything we have comes from you.

In love, you offer us the gift of life -

the bread of heaven,

the cup of salvation,

eternal companionship with you and the company of heaven.

You bless us,

oh, how you bless us.

We offer you ourselves:

our gifts, our skills,

our hands, our hearts,

all to praise you and glorify your name.

May what we offer

be a source of blessing,

bringing a foretaste of your kingdom into the world. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 41, Resources for 16 January 2022, p.79

Sending

Sing - Praise The God Who Changes Places (Together In Song 178)

Praise the God who changes places,
leaves the lofty seat,
welcomes us with warm embraces,
stoops to wash our feet.

Friends be strong!

Hold your heads high!

Freedom is our song! Alleluia!

Praise the rabbi, speaking, doing
all that God intends,
dying, rising, faith renewing,
calling us his friends.

Friends be strong...

Praise the Breath of Love, whose
freedom
spreads our waking wings,
lifting every blight and burden
till the spirit sings:

Friends be strong...

Praise, until we join the singing
far beyond our sight,
with the Ending-and-Beginning,
dancing in the light.

Friends be strong...

© 1996 Hope Publishing Co
Words: Brian Arthur Wren
Music: William P. Rowan

Benediction

Friends, be strong,
hold your heads high.

Sing the song of freedom confidently in your words and in your actions.

And the blessing of God, whose steadfast love reaches further than we can imagine;
the wonder of the Christ, whose abundant joy fills our being;
and the gifting of the Spirit, who sends you into the world to serve;
will be with you - always. Amen.

Rev Kath Merrifield
15 January 2022