

God Revealed: in Relationship

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 “celebration”.
Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

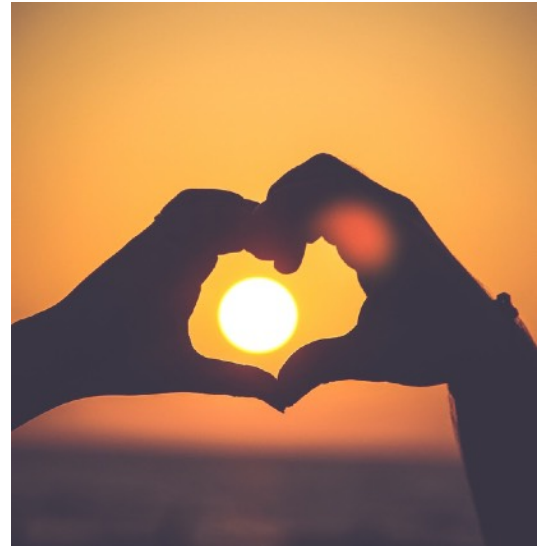
Light Candle

We light a candle to centre us and to draw us towards Christ.

The writer of the gospel attributed to John assures us:

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

John 1:5



Acknowledgement of Country

As we gather in this place, between the mountains and the sea, we give thanks for the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation.

We acknowledge the commitment their ancestors made, across the generations, to nurturing this land.

Together, may we walk into the future,

recognising the sacred footsteps that continue to lead us to the promise of [God’s Way].

Amelia Koh-Butler, Wide and Deep, p.11

Call to Worship

We pray...

Love your enemies.

Love the people who hate you.

Love the people who do you wrong.

Can we? Should we? Will we?

Oh Lord, teach us, speak to us, influence us—

for we come here together from the harshness of life to find we, and all peoples, have a home in your love.

Stretch our hearts and minds, we pray, as we wrestle with what it means to live and share your expansive, inclusive, no-strings-attached love in the world. Amen.

Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 41, Resources for 20 February 2022, p.126

Sing - Sing Of The Lord's Goodness (TIS 183 - vv1,3,4)

We learned this song a few weeks ago - with its jazz-like beat - we sing of God's goodness and offer our praise.

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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Reading: Psalm 37:1-11

- 1 Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,
- 2 for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.

- 3 Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
- 4 Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

- 5 Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
- 6 He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

- 7 Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.

- 8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
- 9 For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

- 10 Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
- 11 But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight in abundant prosperity.

Prayer - Praise and Confession

God of love,
you have given us so much:
you have blessed us with the world in which we live,
you have blessed us with the air we breathe,
the food we eat,
and the water we drink,
for all of which we give you thanks and praise.

Lord of all,
you call us to love one another, just as you love us.
You call us be to merciful, just as you are merciful.
You call us not to judge or condemn.
You call us to give.
You call us to forgive.

Silence

We confess here and now that this is hard to do...
It is often easier to forgive than it is to forget.
Sometimes, it even feels impossible.

Silence

Support us, we pray, as we struggle.
Walk with us, we pray,
as we walk this journey
of forgiveness and healing of relationships.

Silence

Lord Jesus Christ,
hear these prayers
and those locked in our hearts and minds known only to you and to ourselves.
We offer all these things to you in your precious name.
Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 41, Resources for 20 February 2022, p.126

Assurance

The last verses of Psalm 37 (37:39-40) remind us that God continues to offer us a safe place to rest and be restored:

³⁹ The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord;
[God] is their refuge in the time of trouble.

⁴⁰ The Lord helps them and rescues them;
[The Lord] rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
because they take refuge in [God].

Sing - The Anointing (Seasons 9-32)

*Lead us to listen,
to hear the heart speak.
O God in the quiet voice,
draw us to you.
Awaken our wisdom,
enlighten our vision.
Anoint us to heal
and to love as you do.*

Give us faith that is strong,
give us hope that is bright.
May the small voice be our concern,
may we make burdens light.

Lead us to listen...

May we be slow to judge,
may we learn to forgive.
Through compassion and kindness,
may we let others live.

Lead us to listen...

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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Luke 6:27-38

[Jesus continued...]

²⁷ 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

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

Do you ever listen to, watch or read the news and wish God would just zap everyone who is behaving badly - leaders of the world who are sabre-rattling, drug dealers, protesters causing unrest over something I don't agree with, the list is long...?

Have you ever seen the Facebook posts on the community page that offer advice on what should happen to people who don't pick up their dog's droppings or who don't stop when they scape another car in the Woolies carpark or dump rubbish where it shouldn't be

dumped? Apart from incurring the wrath of the commentators, the judgment is often breath-taking.

Some days it seems that there is so much sadness, grief and strife in the world that it threatens to overwhelm us.

The readings today speak into our very present struggle - of pandemic and the fear of disease, of violence and the very real threat to world peace, of our helplessness in the face of the power of money of confusion and distress in the face of misinformation.

The readings speak to our hearts, minds and actions reminding us that what matters most is relationship - relationship with God and relationship with each other.

The Psalmist focuses on our relationship with God, beginning by encouraging us not to "fret". Three (3) times, the psalmist says it: "do not fret" (Psalm 37:1,7,8).

Instead, trust in God (37:3), take delight in God (37:3), be still and be patient (37:7).

Today, with news available to us 24/7 and social media offering us opinion from every angle, it is easy to get drawn into the many woes of the world and their causes. When there is a major tragedy, it is even worse.

Psychologists tell us that the best thing we can do to care for our mental health, is to limit our watching and scrolling - turn off the TV or radio, put down the newspaper or iPad or phone.

The Psalmist goes one step further and encourages us to focus on our Creator - be still, be patient, trust and take delight in the God who holds all the world in God's embrace.

And then when we act, "do good" (37:3).

In some ways, Jesus expands on this in the reading we heard from Luke's gospel.

The reading we heard today continues on from the reading last week, the woes and blessings. Remember, this is Luke's account of the core of Jesus' teaching, that parallels Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5).

And again here, as in the part we looked at last week, Luke's version of Jesus' teaching is more raw than that recorded for us in Matthew's gospel.

At its core, Jesus encourages us to not buy into the violence, hatred and abuse that is all around us, even when it is directed at us. Instead, he calls us to act positively to engage in relationship - "bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:28).

Before I go on, I want to pause and say - that does not mean that if you are in an abusive or violent relationship that you should remain in a place of hurt and danger. I do not think that Jesus ever intended for his words to hold people in relationships that are destructive to them and/or the people around them. In these circumstances, the more appropriate response is to remove the abuser from the person being abused to ensure everyone's safety. Any continuing relationship can only be negotiated when both people are able to engage from a place of equality, dignity and safety.

When Jesus encourages us to "turn the other cheek", he is talking about not returning violence for violence. Some commentators go further and suggest that in the context of Jesus's time, this instruction was directed at slaves who by turning the other cheek in this way exposed their owner's abuse of power for the injustice it was; similarly, handing over your shirt when someone demanded your cloak again exposed the abuse of power. Suffice

to say there is a good deal of debate amongst the commentators about how far this might extend and what Jesus' intention might have been.

On its face, this is about not repaying violence with violence, or not seeking "revenge" as we like to describe it.

Rather, Jesus' teaching here is about considering how we can contribute positively into the situations we find ourselves - even when all our instincts want to retaliate or fight back.

In this sense, loving our enemies is not about having some gushy Valentines-type feeling for them. It is, instead, a commitment to treat every person we encounter as well as, if not better than, we like to be treated ourselves - a commitment to honour the image of God in each human being, a commitment to lay down our lives, our own expectations and desires, to ensure that the most vulnerable in our communities are cared for and treated with dignity and respect.

It is in this sense that love is "unreserved, completely focussed on another's well-being, and that is unconditional." (Spill The Beans, p.123).

And this is not just about how we treat or respond to our friends, or the people who like us, or the people who are like us - the challenge for us is to treat everyone, even the people we don't like or who don't like us, with respect and dignity, seeking to find ways to contribute positively to difficult, fraught or broken relationships.

Perhaps it is about seeing the human being first and foremost, created in the image of God, before we react with judgment. Perhaps this is about being generous - not just with our money or food or stuff (possessions) - but with our emotions and our expectations of others - learning to forgive generously, learning to be open-hearted, open-minded and open-handed before we seek to shut someone down or deny them space.

One of the best pieces of advice I was ever given is to remain curious.

Rather than jumping into a situation or circumstance to defend myself, what question can I ask that will engage a conversation or interaction that gets to the why or the motivation of the other's actions? And then how can I be generous with my time, my energy, my forgiveness? We all know it takes a whole lot more energy to take a deep breath and not respond out of our hurt and pain than it does to react - but we also know that there is little gain in those reactions.

So the next time we feel wronged or injured or we want to condemn or give our opinion about something, perhaps we can learn to take a breath and consider how we can contribute positively into the interaction.

Is it possible to respond in a way that will at least maintain, if not build, a stronger relationship?

Rather than speaking words of condemnation, how can we encourage each other to do better?

Open-hearted, open-minded, open-handed - all for the sake of building relationships - with God and with one another.

As the words of the song we heard earlier prays:

May we be slow to judge,

may we learn to forgive.

Through compassion and kindness,

may we let others live.

Amen.

Responding

Sing - Lord, Let Me See (TIS 681)

We sing a song, a prayer, that we will see, hear, care, learn and love more and more.

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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Prayer for Others (Wendy Fenton)

Loving and compassionate God, who is ever-present. We are grounded in your love. We remember the words of Jesus to "love your neighbour".

We pause to bring our concerns and prayers for others before you. Not as a fix it list for you to remedy but to remind ourselves that we have a responsibility to care for each other as well as ourselves.

We think especially of the needs of families. Families in all their forms. Families with a Mum and Dad and children, single-parent families, blended families, families with same-sex parents, families with adopted children, families with disabled children, displaced families, refugee families, families in detention centres. The tensions, stresses and things that might be challenging households at this time. As well as the things that enrich and strengthen them and the joys of family life.

We think of families where there may be anxiety about children returning to school, or going to school for the first time – facing new fears and challenges.

We think of the extra stress that the virus pandemic has placed on families. Health worries, financial stress, loved ones lost, livelihoods lost or badly damaged, people working from home, children doing home schooling.

We remember especially the people of Tonga, who may be experiencing financial and economic stress as well as dealing with health issues.

We think of families where there is tension and stress, communication breakdown and family violence.

For those experiencing mental health issues, social isolation and homelessness.

For all people everywhere who are facing, or trying to recover from, catastrophic environmental change. Particularly for the people of Western Australia who have lost homes and livestock through fire.

We think also of the factors that protect families and make us stronger and more resilient. Good friends and companions, people to share our lives with, to share our concerns with, people who provide needed support, people who love us. And people who help foster a strong sense of community and identity and hope for the future. Art and music and recreation. Good food and coffee.

We pray for our public health team and for care workers everywhere who are caring for others.

We remind ourselves that we live together in community. We remind ourselves of our call to Mission and responsibility to continue to work for social justice.

We pray for the strength to continue on and to play our part in discerning the future of our Mission in Kiama. We pray for its sustainability and the legacy we will pass to those who follow.

Amen

Offering

As we spend time in reflection this morning, let's consider the commitment we make to love the people of our town, even the people we don't like much or who don't like us...

Generous God,
when the world seems unfair, may we keep showing your love;
when we encounter people we don't like, may we keep showing your love;
when we are tempted to deem someone "undeserving", may we keep showing your love;
when we withdraw our care, our attention, our generosity, nudge us to keep showing your love. Amen.

Sending

Sing - Brother, Sister Let Me Serve You (TIS 650)

Often when we sing this song, we are thinking of the people who are here with us, part of our community of faith. But what if we sing this song with our wider community in mind - the people we would like to connect with, the people we don't like very much, the people we simply don't understand...

Brother, sister,
let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister,
let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Words and Music: Richard Gillard

Benediction

As you look into the heart of another, try and recognise the touch of God.
As you look into the face of another, try and recognise the Christ within.
As you hear the words of another, listen for the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

And be blessed in the name of God, the source of all life and inspiration.
Be blessed in the name of the Christ whose life liberates our expectations.
Be blessed in the name of the Spirit as she breathes new life through us all. Amen.

Rev Kath Merrifield
20 February 2022