

21st Century Disciples: Take The Long View

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 **purple cloth** or scarf to signify that we are moving into a time of preparation for Easter.*

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

Gathering

Welcome!

Whether you come here often or every so often,
Whether you are high and dry or feel up to your neck in
the flood of life,

Whether you are confident of God's presence or
whether you are longing to hear, to see, to touch, to
taste *something* to give you some reassurance,
you are welcome here - and together I pray we will
come to know more of the deep and boundless love of the
Creator, Saviour and Life-giving Spirit.

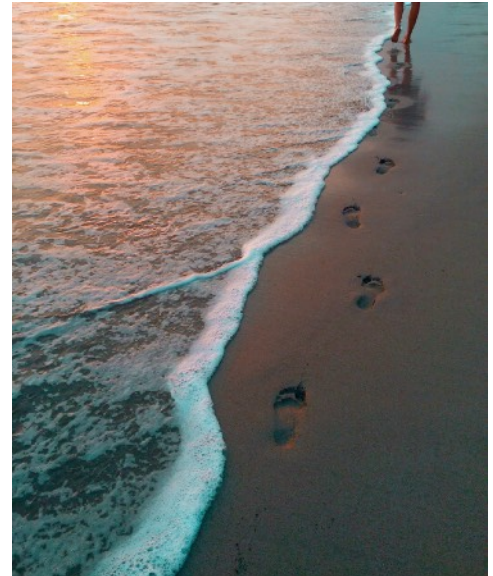


Photo by [Genevieve Dallaire](#)
on [Unsplash](#)

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:

Jesus spoke to them, saying,
"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

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

Introduction

Today we continue our preparations for Easter.

Throughout this time we are reconnecting with what it looks for us to be 21st Century
followers of Jesus.

Last week we were thinking about how we engage with the Scriptures.

Today we are thinking about how 21st Century disciples take the long view.

In a world of instant news, instant access to almost anything we desire, what does it mean
to commit to something, to the way of Jesus, for the long haul...?

Call to Worship

Psalm 27 says this:

¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!

We pray...

Loving God,

when we are very small and feeling sad or frightened,
often the only thing that really helps is a cuddle from someone we trust.

When we fall and hurt ourselves,
we need someone to kiss it better.

When we are tired after a busy day there is nothing nicer than cuddling in for a story before
we to go to sleep.

But somewhere along the line, we get too big for cuddles,
and it isn't cool to admit that we still need them -

until maybe our own children come along and teach us how to be like them;
or we find a friend or two with whom we can share life's ups and downs and we are
comfortable in the embrace of someone who cares.

And then again, we have spent such a long time keeping our distance from one another in
order to not spread disease...

Lord Jesus, may we not push you away when you want to hold us close.

May we reach out in love to one another, and together find strength for the way ahead, and
healing for all our hurts. Amen.

Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 42, Resources for Lent 2, 13 March 2022, p.24

Sing - Come O God of All The Earth (TIS 181)

*Let's stand and sing our invitation for God to come amongst us and to enliven our being
once more.*

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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Reading: Psalm 27

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

⁴ One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his
tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

⁶ Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent

sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

⁷ Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸ 'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!'
Your face, Lord, do I seek.

⁹ Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!

¹⁰ If my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will take me up.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

¹² Do not give me up to the will of
my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against
me,
and they are breathing out violence.

¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of
the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take
courage;
wait for the Lord!

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!

Prayer - Confession

God of mercy, we are at times a people easily given to despair.

When we look into the future, we often see endings and not beginnings.

We confess that we can get entangled in the problems of this world and have trouble seeing hope for the future.

We grow accustomed to sighing and in our cynicism, we evade your call to new life.

It is easy, O God,

to see where others have gone wrong;

not so easy to admit to our own faults and failings.

We too have dishonoured you and given our churches a bad name whenever we have listened to gossip or helped to spread it;

when we have fallen out over something that seemed important at the time

but actually matters not a jot;
or when we have come here with anything other than worship at the forefront of our minds.

Forgive us, we pray, and help us,
if it is not too late,
to undo some of the damage we have caused.
Draw us into the warmth of your embrace
and hold us until our anger and confusion and fear begin to dwindle
and we can go into the world again
ready to see other people - including those with whom we disagree - through your eyes of
compassion and grace.

Forgive us for our lack of faith and restore in us a trust in your power to create new
beginnings, where we are not able to imagine them. Amen.

*Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Lent 2, 13 March 2022, p.33
and Spill The Beans, Issue 42, Resources for Lent 2, 13 March 2022, p.24*

Sing / Listen - How Long?

How long must we cry out
'Till justice rolls down like a river?
How long will this night last
And when will we all be together?

*Teach me to do what is right -
work in the darkness, trust in the light,
and may love be the path I walk upon.*

How long will these bombs fall
And bodies get twisted and broken?
How long will these voices
Keep shouting loud insult and slogan?
Teach me to do what is right...

How long ? Will your creatures
Be trampled degraded forever?
How long, must we cry out
'Till justice rolls down like a river?
Teach me to do what is right...

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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Luke 13:31-35

³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.' ³² He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³ Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem." ³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵ See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." '

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

Gathering God, we wait patiently, longing to see your goodness in our world.

Lift our eyes to see, widen our vision and open our hearts to embrace the wonder that you have created.

Give us courage to face the brokenness.

And remind us again of the hope you offer to us and to all the world. Amen.

The readings in the lead-up to Easter invite us to consider carefully and deeply our commitment to following Jesus.

Last week, we encountered Jesus in the wilderness, being tempted or tested - how will he use Scripture? How will he use the power and authority he has been given?

Are we prepared to follow him into the wilderness?

How is not only our knowledge of the Scriptures but our understanding and ability to draw from its wisdom to enable us in today's world?

Today, we leap towards the other end of Jesus' travels towards Jerusalem. He is not far from the city when he is warned to clear off because Herod, has it in for him.

Jesus' response places himself squarely in the political, religious and social milieu of the time. He doesn't run away from the threat but confronts it, not in a fist-shaking kind of way but in speaking truth to power, lamenting the present reality and committing to the continuing work of teaching, healing and reminding people of God's intentions for them.

Now there is a good deal of symbol and sign in Jesus' language here which I am happy to go into on another occasion - today I want us to look at this through the question - what is it revealing to us about how we are called to follow Jesus today?

Taking the long view...

Jesus is not afraid to name the duplicity of Herod - "that fox", Jesus calls him.

He is also able to grieve for what is broken - the state of the city of Jerusalem - intended to be a "light to the nations", called by the prophets time and again to return to God's way, and yet hostile and resistance to God's purpose.

And in the midst of the political manoeuvrings, the Roman oppression, the religious ignorance, Jesus keeps at his task of healing, giving hope to people caught in the midst of circumstances not entirely of their own making, teaching a way of living that confronts power and politics and injustice with love, grace and mercy.

Taking the long view - trusting the impossibility of God's way of love.

Taking the long view - working, long-term, committing, long-term, to working for justice, peace, reconciliation, a world that better reflects God's intention for us all - and not giving up when solutions aren't easy or change seems to be more like "one step forward and two steps back" ..

In a world that wants instant solutions, expects easy answers, gives up or loses interest when things get a bit complex, Jesus' followers are in for the long haul.

I have an Uncle in England who is a retired policeman - Derbyshire Police. He refuses to watch police dramas on television - particularly the ones that insist on the case being resolved within the space of one episode...

As with police dramas, life's problems are rarely resolved in the space of an hour, or even a day, and sometimes they take years.

Jesus' disciples commit to the long-term.

Even when a resolution or reconciliation seems well beyond our grasp. The Scriptures are full of stories of God doing amazing things - and often taking years - again we get caught in the simplicity of a few page turns, but more often than not, there are years, if not decades in between. For example, in the Old Testament reading (which we haven't read, Genesis 15, God promises Abram and Sarai descendants that will number more than the stars in the sky! They are both already old, remember they were in their 70s when they followed God's call to a new land, and yet they will wait even longer before God begins to fulfil that promise.

The Psalmist in Psalm 27 speaks of experiences that have challenged him and of the hope in God that sustains him. This is a psalm that speaks across stretches of lived experience - both joyful and challenging. It begins with a statement of faith:

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

It traverses the experiences of life and death.
And ends with a statement of hope and commitment:

¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.
¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!

The followers of Jesus hold all of this.
As the song we heard says, "work in the darkness, trust in the light".

But us humans, well, we are not always good at remembering God's promises, God's love, God's call to us. When life gets hard, we are often quick to forget.

Which is why it is important that Jesus's followers meet together often - to remind one another, to encourage one another.

In Abram's time, God gave Abram an amazing vision to remind him.

To us, Jesus gave us this meal - so that as we share together, we would remember him, remember his life, remember what it cost, remember his risen life, and catch a glimpse of what we can be when we share together without discrimination or favouritism or privilege getting in the way.

Whether life is going well or is more of a struggle, this table reminds us of the goodness of God, it grounds us and holds us, and invites us to "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage" (Psalm 27:14).

That's not to say we "wait" with our feet up and a cup of tea!

Rather, our waiting is active - as Jesus says in Luke 13 - keeping on with the ministry of healing, loving, attending to people around us, working for peace and justice in the communities we are a part of, making space for the in-breaking of God's love and life in the world.

Jesus' followers take the long view.

Covenant God, may we trust in you when the evidence says don't. May we follow you when the world says not to. May we live with the impossible when everything else says we can't. May we hear the promise in our souls, and live it in our world. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Lent 2, 13 March 2022, p.30

Responding

Sing - Song of Faith (tune: TIS 698 - Ode To Joy)

Song of faith that sings forever
through God's people, ages long,
Word that holds the world together
when our hearts take up the song,
always, always somewhere sounding,
though the source we do not see,
counterpoint to all despairing
it is hope that sets the key.

Song of faith in exultation,
rising through the vaults of prayer,
tune of simple celebration
offered up in open air,
song in chapel and cathedral,

descant to our daily tone,
song from sickbed or in prison:
faith must often sing alone.

And when life would overwhelm us,
when there seems no song to sing,
hear the constant voice of courage
out of fear and suffering:
all who've loved and trusted Jesus,
all who lift us to be strong,
endless, endless are the voices
of the faith that makes the song.

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Blessing - Jake and Zoe

Invite Jake, Zoe, Margaret, John

One of the ways we are encouraged in our faith is through the love, prayer and support of family and the community of faith.

One of the blessings of the Christian community is that we get to watch people grow up amongst us, grow old amongst us, hopefully, grow in Christ amongst us.

Jake first came amongst us as a small child.

Margaret brought him here to be held in the love of God.

Now Jake brings Zoe as they begin the next part of their life together when they get married later this week.

Jake and Zoe - when things are going great, and when things get tough for you, as well they may, remember this -

remember that your grandmother and grandfather pray for you every day,
remember that these brothers, sisters, parents and friends in Christ are also praying for you.

And remember that, no matter what, you will always have a home amongst us.

Let us pray...

God of Love, we give thanks for Jake and Zoe as they seek your blessing on their life together.

We pray that you will hold them always in your love and grace.

We give thanks for Margaret and John and their example of faith and love.

We pray that Jake and Zoe will always know they are surrounded by Love, held and supported by their family of faith.

We pray that their celebrations on Thursday will be a time of great joy and hope.

And we pray that you will bless them as they begin this new part of their lives together.

As they know your love in their lives, may they share your love with their friends and family and the people they encounter throughout their lives.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others

Faithful God,

we are awed by Jesus' ability to keep focussed on his goals;
to hold fast to choices made years earlier even when he could now see what it was going to cost him.

We give thanks for all who, like him, refuse to stop caring for others even when they meet with nothing but cruelty and rejection.

Thank you for the vulnerability that never left Jesus and was part of his strength.

Such people are few and far between, and we pray for people, ourselves included, who find it hard to stick to your way of integrity and costly, unconditional love.

We pray for parents, trying to give their children a firm foundation in life, especially if they have not received what they needed early on to feel safe in the world.

We think of the clear vision and idealism of so many of our young people, and ask that they may not become too cynical too soon.

We pray for politicians and civil servants,
for charity and aid workers, teachers and carers,
all who chose a life of public service because they wanted to make the world a better place.

Many are tired and disillusioned;

some have compromised their ideals;

some have put on a hard shell of indifference because the cost of caring and not being able to help is just too high.

We especially pray for people who are responding in places of war, especially in Ukraine, and in places of natural disaster, especially here after the flooding.

We pray for people caught in the mess.

We pray for leaders of nations, of organisations, of local communities.

We pray for each individual whose life has been impacted and irrevocably changed.

We pray for people who, like the people whom Jesus saw in Jerusalem,

have lost their sense of purpose and direction;

people who have been let down too often to trust again;

people, again ourselves included, who cannot bear to watch or listen to the news because there is just too much suffering in the world;

too many problems that cannot be solved;

too many people beyond our reach to help.

Loving God,

may your compassion break through all our defences.

May we be willing to take just one more risk for love's sake,

and in the eternal battle between goodness and evil, love and hatred, life and death,

may we discover, with Christ and all his faithful servants,

that goodness and love and life

are always stronger

and will win out in the end.

Amen.

Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 42, Resources for Lent 2, 13 March 2022, p.25

Sing - We Give Thanks (Seasons 5-44)

We give thanks for the goodness of love that is shared.

We give thanks for this table around which we are fed.

We give thanks for this circle of friends and family.

We give thanks, we give thanks, and we give thanks.

We give thanks for the offering of bread and of wine.

We give thanks for these blessings from earth and of vine.

We give thanks for this gathering of symbol, sign and song.

We give thanks, we give thanks, we give thanks.

We give thanks for tomorrow and thanks for today.

We give thanks for the journey and faith along the way.

We give thanks for the promise of Jesus with us now.

We give thanks, we give thanks, and we give thanks.

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Holy Communion

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join with us in-person, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you.

Offering

Today, we are able to return to bringing the offering bags to you. The stewards will bring them but please don't try and take them - please just pop your offering into the bag as it passes.

As we make our offering, this is not just about cash - many people give electronically now - this time is also an opportunity to consider what time, skills and commitment we make to the work of God in the world...

God of reliable compassion and dependable grace,
we know that we can trust you to keep your promises.

We are much more fickle,
and more easily diverted from the costly way of love.

Today, having been reminded of just how much Jesus was willing to give for us, we look again at our commitment to him.

Insofar as we are able,
we renew our promise to follow faithfully wherever he wants us to go,
and that is the offering we bring. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 42, Resources for Lent 2, 13 March 2022, p.26

Sending

Sing - Teach Me To Dance (The Source 469 / P&W 728)

The Psalmist speaks of a longing to behold the beauty of the Lord - this song asks, "let all my energy blaze to see the joy in your face, let my whole being praise you..."

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,

teach me to move in the pow'r of your Spirit,

teach me to walk in the light of your presence,

teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.

Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,

teach me to trust in the word of your promise,

teach me to hope in the day of your coming,

teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.

You wrote the rhythm of life, created heaven and earth,

in you is joy without measure.

So, like a child in your sight, I dance to see your delight,

for I was made for your pleasure, pleasure.

Teach me to dance...

Let all my movements express a heart that loves to say 'yes',

a will that leaps to obey you.

Let all my energy blaze to see the joy in your face;

let my whole being praise you, praise you.

Teach me to dance...

*Words and music: Graham Kendrick and Steve Thompson
© 1993 Make Way Music*

Benediction

May God bless you with discomfort

At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,

So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger

At injustice, oppression and exploitation of people,

So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears

To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them

And turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness

To believe that you can make a difference in the world,

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

Amen.

A Franciscan Benediction

Rev Kath Merrifield
13 March 2022