

Love One Another

We Gather

*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 **white cloth** or scarf to signify that this is a celebration - Easter. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God*



Gathering

We light the Christ candle to draw us close to each other and to Jesus, who is present when we are gathered.

Acknowledgement of Country

We have come here to this place to live, to work, to learn, to heal, to rest. We have come to this place from all over the world. We come to share the best this place can offer, we come to call this place home for a time.

We acknowledge those who came before us, we acknowledge the generations of those who have walked on this land, lived by the seasons and cared for this place. We acknowledge the WodiWodi people of the Dharawal nation, their elders past and present and their leaders yet to be.

Call to Worship Litany (inspired by John 13:34-35)

Jesus has given us a new commandment:
We are commanded to love one another.
Just as Christ has loved us,
So we ought to have love for one another.
By this, everyone will know we are Christ's disciples:
By our love for one another.
Come, may we join our hearts in worship:
Worship God by loving one another.

Hymn: Sing praise to the Lord

or watch on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3NB4712-H8>

Sing praise to the Lord!
Praise him in the height
Rejoice in his Word
You angels of light:
All heavens adore him
By whom you were made,
and worship before him
in brightness arrayed.

Sing praise to the Lord!
Sing praise upon earth
In tuneful accord sing praise for
new birth
Praise him who has brought you
his grace from above
Praise him who has taught you
to sing of his love.

Sing praises to the Lord
All things that give sound
Each jubilant chord re-echo around
Loud organs, his glory
Tell out in deep tone,
and sweet harp, the story
Of what he has done.

Sing praises to the Lord!
Thanksgiving and song
to him be outpoured all ages along
For love in creation
for heaven restored
For grace of salvation
Sing praises to the Lord!

Prayer of approach (based on Psalm 148)

Lord, your greatness is so considerable
I'd need a cosmic chorus to proclaim it.
If I invited every vocalist in heaven—
sun, Mercury, moon, Big Dipper, and all the angels;
and I summoned every singer on earth—
Humpback whales, the blue mountains and alps, apple trees, mice,
eagles, kings, presidents, boys and girls, men and women;
my choir would still be powerless
to truly proclaim the praise you deserve.

But here we gather together anyway...
We gather to praise you O God,
for all the things we can see, and sometimes understand:
the sun, moon and stars; the clouds and changing weather:
We join in their eternal chorus of praise to God.

We gather to praise you, O God,
for all the things that we cannot see or understand:
all heaven's angels, outer space; and the skies above us;
We join in their eternal chorus of praise to God.

We gather to praise you O God,
for all the things in life that we experience:
the created world, people of all ages and circumstances, all God's creations.

We join in their eternal chorus of praise to God:

whose name is glorious, and whose ways are holy. Amen.

~ adapted from works written by Joan Stott, and posted on *The Timeless Psalms*.
Chris Altrock, on his *TrueNorth* blog.

Hymn: The church's one foundation

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord
She is his new creation
By water and the Word
From heav'n He came and sought
her
To be His holy bride
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

Elect from every nation
Yet one o'er all the earth
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth
One holy name she blesses
Partakes one holy food
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued.

Through toil and tribulation
And tumult of her war
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore,
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blessed
And the great church victorious
Shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth has union
With God the Three in One
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won
O happy ones and holy
Lord give to us the grace
Like them the meek and lowly
in heaven seek your face.

We listen for God's voice



This painting is called "creation story" and was painted by Kristy Burgu and offered as part of a bible study for the Uniting Church's 16th Assembly held in Brisbane last week. I wanted to go but wasn't allowed and Kath was supposed to go and couldn't because of Covid...but the artist is a pastor from Mowumjum – where Andrew Watts and his father before him both served in ministry.

I've always loved the various creation stories I've heard from the different Aboriginal communities to which we have travelled but it's hard to reconcile those stories with the genesis story and then science. But as art, it's clear.

How do you explain the story of becoming and belonging? How do you explain it all to a 7 year old with limited experience, a 17 year old who knows it all or a 70 year old who has lived it all? The picture is worth a thousand words.

Kristy's story was interesting as she could see this painting in her head, long before it was on paper. She could identify most of the characters, the Father and the Son, she could

understand the snakes the Father called out of the earth to carve the earth into landscapes and she could understand the owlets on the shoulders of the father and son, as the moieties or marriage clans for the three tribes represented by the three orange and white figures, Wandjina, at the bottom of the painting. These three represent the three language groups of the western Kimberleys.

But she kept seeing the spooky looking character below the son. It would turn up in her thinking but she didn't know who it was or why it appeared. She went to those she trusted and asked questions. Once the answers came, she could paint her. This Wandjina is a bush woman, the mother of all people.

Have a look at this painting and think about what it says to you. Is there something that surprises you about the painting? Is there something it calls you to do? Hold that thought.

Readings

Acts 11: 1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him, ³saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' ⁴Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. ⁶As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷I also heard a voice saying to me, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." ⁸But I replied, "By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth." ⁹But a second time the voice answered from heaven, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." ¹⁰This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. ¹¹At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹²The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, "Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; ¹⁴he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved." ¹⁵And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, "John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁷If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?' ¹⁸When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, 'Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.'

John 13: 31-35

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Message

Imagine if you were Peter, alone and praying and suddenly you had a vision of a blanket with all manner of animals and reptiles on it... and you heard God tell you to 'kill and eat',

three times, what would you think? You see it in your head over and over and over. Is there something in that image that surprises you? Is there something in that image or vision calls you to do? Hold that thought.

We've heard two stories this morning about visions which come to people, people who are sincere in their belief in God and their hope in Jesus Christ. These visions are to make a difference in the lives of those who see the image God is offering but are to make a difference to us as well.

Kristy tells her story about the spooky character because when those she trusted told her who it was, it filled in many gaps for her, especially when she couldn't get her head around the God head three in one. She spoke about that last weekend, at Assembly. To find out that this spooky character was in fact a feature of her own history, the bush woman, it all began to make sense to her. (Pause)

Peter was a hard working fisher who now fished for people instead of fish. He was an ordinary person in an extraordinary situation. His Jewishness told him not to go into the house of a non-Jew and certainly not to eat there but in obedience to the call of God, and contrary to his heritage and practices of a lifetime, Peter learns that God show no favourites (Acts 10: 34-35) but accepts people from every nation.

Putting this in context, there are a few things we need to remember about Peter's Jewish heritage – firstly, he, like all Jewish males, was circumcised. This was an outward sign of God's covenant with his people. Next, there were hundreds of dietary laws which were to be obeyed and included only eating with others who obeyed those same laws. Those laws included a list of animals which were forbidden, including meat from pigs, fish without scales, shellfish and animals without split hooves.

Here was Peter, he'd had a vision from God, and was given instructions to go with others to meet not just a Gentile but a Roman Centurion... and then, as we heard in today's reading, he was called to account by fellow Jews...so, Peter and the other witnesses explained it all to them. It was interesting how in an assortment of commentaries about today's reading they all speak about Luke telling this story twice. I tell all my stories twice, particularly to Ian, because I don't think he gets it the first time...However, telling the story twice is about amplifying the importance of the story. What surprised you about the story? And what does the story call you to do? Hold that thought.

One of the other lectionary readings set down for this week is from Revelations 21: 1-8 and the title is the New Jerusalem. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth and the first heaven and first earth passed away, and there was no longer any sea...Another vision, attributed to the disciple John, he describes something to us which is hard to comprehend. A new heaven, a new earth, a new city of Jerusalem. " I am making everything new...it is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To those who are thirsty, I will give drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. They who overcome will inherit all of this and I will be their God and they will be my children." What surprises you about this story? What does this story call you to do? Hold that thought.

Jesus tells his disciples that he's leaving them but then he says to them "A new command I give you; love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another...By this others will know that you're are my disciples, if you love one another." This is a concrete vision for us all, that we learn to love others in ways which allow them to also live worthwhile and fruitful lives. The Hebrew word Jesus used to describe this love means

steadfast love, mercy, kindness, and goodness. It is not so much a feeling, as it is an action, the things we do for others with steadfast faithfulness and loyalty, is what marks us as Jesus' followers.

Jesus asks us to offer to others what he has offered to us, his selfless and sacrificial love, his steadfast faithfulness and loyalty. He asks nothing of us than to do the same for others. He said all of this before he was betrayed and denied, before he was humiliated and abandoned. He said this knowing his friends' frailties but knowing also that he would never leave them. It is in this concrete vision of Jesus' love for the whole world that we find ourselves able to live out that which he calls us to do.

I've asked you what surprises you in these stories of vision and the explanations. I've asked you what these stories call you to do, as an individual follower of Jesus and as a family brought together to be the body of Christ in this place. I asked you to hold those thoughts.

For those who follow the lectionary, all of the readings this week were about visions of some kind, John in Revelations, Peter in Acts, Zechariah and I added the story about Kristy Burgu from Mowumjum. Are we people who can see Jesus' vision for the whole world, even through the murkiness of this life? Are we people who listen when God calls us to love one another with mercy, goodness and steadfast loyalty?

Kirsty Burgu is a shy Aboriginal woman who spoke quietly but earnestly about her art, and the gift offered to her, and to others, from what she saw in her head and then painted as she who works, together with her grandmother, to be the body of Christ in her community, as well as to others.

Peter was an ordinary person in an extraordinary life. As a witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus he stayed faithful to God and lived in the hope of Jesus but learned to live a new way, understanding that God does not show favour in this world, his love is for all. Does that surprise you? Does that call you to do something? Don't hold that thought, act on it. Jesus' love is more than a feeling, it is action.

And may God add his blessing to these words. Amen

We respond

Offering prayer

As we make our offering, this is not just about the money we bring, this time is also an opportunity to consider what time, skills and commitment we make to the work of God in the world...

You are making all things new.

A new heaven

A new earth

A new way of thinking

A new way of being.

You are making all things new.

No more Death

No more mourning

No more crying

No more pain.

You are making all things new.
Renew our minds
to renew the world
by living out your
commandment of love.

You are making all things new and so take these our offering, including ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer for others

Dear God, Lord and Master, How wondrous is your great forgiving love, mighty God!
We know we can come to you, no matter our sins and we are forgiven
No sin is unforgivable by God, he welcomes all His children
As people born of your Spirit, we are awakened to a world that is caught still in the night-
shades of darkness, and broken in its suffering.
Let us see the world the way you see the world, through eyes of love,
With hearts of compassion and with hands of mercy and grace.
Let us, through deeds great and small, shine a light of kindness in the world.
Let us look for opportunities every day to shine light and kindness on someone's life.

In the midst of death, we long to bring life;
In the midst of sorrow, we long to bring joy
In the midst of confusion, we long to bring clarity.

We see Jesus, and we lift him up as a beacon of your love and promise to the whole world.
Hear our prayers for those who are suffering — the hungry and homeless,
the sick and imprisoned, the angry, the lonely and lost.
We pray that you would not let these concern pass from our hearts
as quickly as these words pass from our lips,
but rather that you would empower us to do your work of healing and reconciliation in their lives.

We especially lift to you this day all those who are close to our hearts, (pause)
and for ourselves in our own needs. (pause)
As you made a fearful and disjointed band of disciples into your holy church,
we pray that you would make us anew, that we, your body in the world,
would serve you in joy and hope and thankfulness all the days of our life,
together in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whose glorious name we pray.

Our Father in Heaven Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us
Save us from the time of trial And deliver us from evil
For yours in the kingdom the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

~ adapted from Life in Liturgy. <https://lifeinliturgy.wordpress.com>

Sending out

Hymn: A new commandment I give unto you

A new commandment I give unto you
That you love one another as I have
loved you
That you love one another as I have
loved you

By this shall all know that you are My
disciples
If you have love one for another
By this shall all know that you are My
disciples
If you have love one for another

A new commandment I give unto you
That you love one another as I have
loved you
That you love one another as I have
loved you

True love is patient not arrogant nor
boastful
Love bears all things, love is eternal.
True love is patient not arrogant nor
boastful
Love bears all things, love is eternal.

A new commandment I give unto you
That you love one another as I have
loved you
That you love one another as I have
loved you

Closing Commission (based on John 13: 31-35)

Christ has given us a new commandment:
that we love one another, as Christ has loved us.
By this, everyone will know that we are Christ's disciples,
if we share that love with the world.
And through this love, all things will be made new.
Go now, and do as Christ commands. **Amen.**

Meredith Yabsley
15 May 2022