

God's Abundant Restoration

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 worshipping in "ordinary time". Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Gathering

It is only 4 more Sundays until we begin our preparations for Christmas.

In these last few weeks of the Church year, we are thinking about what God's reign is about and how we talk about it in our world today - what are we hoping for, what are we praying for, and, importantly, what are we *working* towards?

Today the readings from the prophet Joel and the Psalm 65 point us towards God's promised restoration. We live in a broken world, and our hearts ache for wholeness - these readings offer a vision of a world restored, a world of abundance and joy.



Light Candle

We light the candle - focussing our attention, allowing ourselves to be drawn to its flame. We look to Jesus, the light of the world, a light that shines even in the darkest of times offering hope and healing.

Acknowledgement of Country

As we look upon the hills and valleys, the oceans and rivers of this place, we see the love poured out upon this Land by those who have cared for it since time beyond measure.

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.

We honour those who have gone before and those who are yet to come.

May we be mindful of the calling God places on all humanity to care for Creation.

May we take our lead from the Wadi Wadi People of the Dharawal Nation, whose stories are entwined with the stewarding of this place.

May we learn from them and walk with them.

Call to Worship

God of the cosmos, quasars, and constellations,
God of the unfathomably big and microscopically small;
God of all time and eternity,
limitless, infinite—
we worship you.

God of love, made flesh in Jesus;
God of the outcast, the exiled, the stranger;
God of grace and glory,
found in wood and nails;
self-giving, Saviour—
we worship you.

Spill The Beans, Issue 44, Resources for 23 October 2022, p.72

Sing - God of Creation (Tune: 'Morning Has Broken', TIS 156)

We sing a song that celebrates the God of Creation...

God of Creation, Gentle life-giver
Present at birth, and
all through our days
Author of sunrise
Song in the night sky
Here in this place, we offer our praise

Spirit of Comfort, blow through Creation
stir up new life, breathe
peace through our world
Healer of hearts, and
hope for tomorrow
weave all our sorrows into new dawn

Jesus, Companion, teacher and healer
friend of the grieving,
suffering, the poor
Stand with your people
whisper among us
promise of mercy
goodness for all

Here we give thanks for life in its fullness
blessings received
your gifts to us all
Make us a people
filled with compassion
selflessly giving
serving your world.

Craig Mitchell (2017)

Reading: Psalm 65

- 1 Praise is due to you,
O God, in Zion;
and to you shall vows be performed,
- 2 O you who answer prayer!
To you all flesh shall come.
- 3 When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,
you forgive our transgressions.
- 4 Happy are those whom you choose and bring near
to live in your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
your holy temple.
- 5 By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas.
- 6 By your strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.
- 7 You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.
- 8 Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

- ⁹ You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.
- ¹⁰ You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.
- ¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
- ¹² The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
- ¹³ the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

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 - based on Psalm 65

Creator God, we come to you offering our praise -
to you who created the mountains and rivers,
who breathes across the waters and makes the waves rise up,
and then stills the ocean so that it shimmers in the spring sunshine.
Praise to you who has put the sun and moon in motion bringing day and night,
and the ebb and flow of the tides.
Praise to you who makes the sun shine and the rains fall,
enabling grain and vegetables to grow, providing food and nourishment to all your
creatures.
As we gaze in wonder at your creation, we join in nature's song of joy.

And as we praise you, we offer our commitment to try to live into the life to which you call
us.

But we know we don't always live to our potential in you.
So when we let you down,
when we let each other down,
when we let our friends and neighbours down,
forgive us.

And as we know the hope of your forgiveness, so help us to offer forgiveness and hope to
the world around us.

Draw us close, as you promise in the words of the psalmist,
deliver us and satisfy our needs.

And as we are embraced in your Love and grace, so may we extend the same to the world
around us. Amen.

Sing - Song of Hope (Seasons 2-34)

We learnt this song last week, a song that invites us to stay connected with the hope that is the presence and promise of God.

Just when our hope was defeated
clear was the voice of the Spirit:
“See how your brothers have not given up
in the struggle to better the world.
See how your sisters have not given up in
the struggle to better the world.”

*God is uplifting the people.
God is the power within us.
Hope is our music and freedom our
song
and together our voices will ring.*

Just when our hope was defeated
clear was the voice of the Spirit:
“Reach out to all of your brothers and build
with each other, a world of peace.
Reach out to all of your sisters and build
with each other, a world of peace.”
God is uplifting the people...

Just when our hope was defeated
clear was the voice of the Spirit:
“I will be with you and I will uplift you and
give you the strength to endure.
I will be with you and I will uplift you and
give you the strength to endure.”
God is uplifting the people...

*Words and Music: Ester Camac and Edwin Mora Guevara
English translation: Bret Hesla
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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Joel 2:23-32

²³ O children of Zion, be glad
and rejoice in the Lord your God;
for he has given the early rain for your vindication,
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.

²⁴ The threshing-floors shall be full of grain,
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

²⁵ I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent against you.

²⁶ You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁷ You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other.
And my people shall never again
be put to shame.

²⁸ Then afterwards
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

²⁹ Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

³⁰ I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. ³²Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.

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

God, be present to us in words of affirmation and love. Be near us in the constant challenge to overcome our arrogance and pride. Help us to be led by your grace to find humility in ourselves this day. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, resources for 23 October 2022, p.112

*²³ O children of Zion, be glad
and rejoice in the Lord your God;
for he has given the early rain for your vindication,
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.*

And in Psalm 65:

*⁹ You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.*

*¹⁰ You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.*

To which, we might respond today - abundant rain is one thing, but please, we have had enough now for a little while!

But remember, these words were written for a people who lived in an arid environment - rain was a source of life and restoration.

As it is here in our country of great contrasts -

*I love a sunburnt country
a land of sweeping plains,
of ragged mountain ranges,
of drought and flooding rains... (My Country, Dorothea Mackellar)*

The challenge for us is that the droughts, and the flooding rains, can be devastating for people and livestock and crops - and yet it is the same floods that restore the land and its soil so that livestock and crops can thrive.

So how do we hold together the world of abundance that is promised and celebrated in the Psalm we read earlier and in the reading from Joel?

Let's start with Joel. It is a short book - only 3 chapters.

It is a set of prophetic poems - remember, prophecy is not about telling the future, but about speaking God's truth into the world.

In these poems, Joel refers to other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures and wrestles with those texts as he sees the world around him.

One of the nice things about Joel is that he is not so concerned about Israel's sin as some of the other prophetic writings are - he seems more concerned with making sense of God's promises in the world he sees around him.

In chapter 1, he describes how God has rescued them in the past from natural disaster (a plague of locusts that devastated their crops).

And then, here in chapter 2, he is trying to interpret their present - recognising that God's saving grace and God's promise of restoration sit in the midst of and alongside the reality of the world today - that is, our reality, as broken as it sometimes feels and is, is intertwined with our present and future hope, the promise that God is in our midst (2:27) and at work in the world bringing restoration and pouring out God's spirit on "all flesh" (2:28).

All flesh - women and men, young and old, slave and free (2:28-29) - echoed in Psalm 65:3 - God's promise is for all people. This is an extravagant pouring out of God's divine self into the world that is beyond gender, age or culture and class!

God's promise of abundance and restoration is intertwined with the "portents in the heavens and on the earth" (2:30), the signs, the darkness of the sun and blood of the moon (2:31) - it is not surprising that the people of Jesus' time saw what we know now as a "blood moon" or an eclipse as a sign of coming troubles...

But where many have tried to interpret the words of the prophet to suggest they are signs of end of the world, I want to suggest the prophetic poems here speak wisdom into our lived reality.

Natural disasters do come upon us from time to time.

The sun goes dark, the moon turns red.

Far from pointing to the "end" or the destruction of the world, these signs occur in the midst of our living, and God is present in it all, yearning for us to notice - to turn again towards the way God intends for us, to call on God - and as we do, God's promise is to "save us" (2:32) Psalm 65:5 uses the word "deliverance" - that is, not to rescue us immediately from the perils of the flood or the consequence of locusts eating the crops, but more likely, to save us "from ourselves" - because we know that when we turn towards God, when we attend to the relationships between us, when we attend to our relationship with the earth, there is enough for everyone, there is enough food to eat. And when people are able to live peaceably and to engage in meaningful work, When we are "satisfied with the goodness of your house" (psalm 65:4), the kind of life we yearn for is possible - "life abundant" as Jesus describes it in John 10:10.

Three times, Joel repeats the phrase, "my people shall never again be put to shame".

What causes us shame? Usually it is all the things we try to cover up - the times we have done the wrong thing, or not done the right thing, the times we turn away from the path God shows us, the times we bury our heads in the sand.

And these things are part of our lives both as individuals, as groups together, as congregations, as nations.

But in turning towards God, Psalm 65:3 puts it like this:

*When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,
you forgive our transgressions.*

And God's promise is that the damage caused in our brokenness can be restored - perhaps not overnight, certainly not magically or without a good deal of hard work from us - restoration is much more complex than God responding instantaneously to our wish list. But I do think that it is about how when we return to the vision God has for "all flesh", when

we shape our lives around that vision, making choices that reflect the love God has for all people and all creatures, then restoration in abundance begins. And as restoration unfolds, beauty is restored, the productivity of the soil is restored (Psalm 65:11-13), and God's people "will never again be put to shame".

So let me sum up...

God promises abundance, the scriptures speak of the earth being restored - but it is not something that happens by magic.

It is inextricably linked with people, you and I, turning towards God, and shaping our lives in a way that reflects God's intention for the world.

So:

What does it mean for you to recognise God's spirit poured out on all flesh? (Joel 2:28 and Psalm 65:2)

What does it mean for you to be satisfied with the goodness of what we have (Psalm 65:4)?

What does it mean for you to shape your life around God's vision for the world - this vision that sees the earth and its peoples in harmony and at peace?

Let us pray...

God fo all Creation,

open our eyes and ears and hearts to your dream for us and our world.

Pour out your spirit here, on us, today.

Inspire in us the humility and courage to turn toward you and to shape our lives in ways that reflect your love and grace in the world. And may we know the joy of your abundant life in our own time and place. Amen.

Responding

Listen - Renew Our World (Tearfund)

Go here to watch a video: <https://www.tearfund.org.au/get-involved/advocacy/renew-our-world/renew-our-world-worship-anthem>

Prayer for Others (Michele Broad)

Loving Father God,

How lucky are we to have your loving presence in our lives.

How blessed are we to know you and to receive your abundant grace and kindness in our lives.

How grateful are we Lord that you love us and that we have the privilege of worshipping you and serving you.

We pray for a hurting world, that people can experience your arms around them even in times of difficulty and pain. We see war, injustice, violence, corruption and greed and the impact of these on humanity. Our world needs your heart, your hands and your mind .

Precious God, You look on all the people of the world as one. All loved and called to you. We pray that they may experience your eyes seeing them, your everlasting presence, your home.

Your compassion reaches out to all of creation.

May we have your eyes of compassion to be there for others.

May we never look down on others, or turn aside from their pain but reach out to make a difference.

May we know that you equip us, empower us,
to effect change in our communities and in the world.

Help us to remember, even in our inadequacy, that when we depend on you, much is possible.

So, help us to risk our comfort to speak out against injustice.

Help us to put aside our complacency to act for those who are persecuted.

Help us to share all that we have to give to those who are hungry or homeless.

God give us your heart to serve our neighbours and to see in the face of all we encounter, the face of Christ, our Lord— whose we are... and whom we serve.

Amen

Offering

We make space now to think about what we have heard and seen today and consider our response.

As we make our offering - we remember again that this is not just about money - either here in the plate or through a bank transfer - this is also about how we are generous with our time and energy and gifts; and about how we resolve to live differently because we have encountered the living Christ.

And if this is your first time with us or if you are visiting, please don't feel obliged to give.

You are our guests, and we want you simply to enjoy the blessings of worshipping together.

We are glad you are here!

God who has given us everything, may we not withhold anything.

May we not judge any as undeserving of love

or hold back from reaching out.

And in our serving may we find joy. Amen.

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Sending

Sing - On Holy Ground (AOV2-103)

We go with a song, I hope we will grow into...

The heavens embrace the earth,
then they sing of the new birth.

The earth echoes and resounds
that we are on holy ground.

Do you believe in freedom?

Yes we do Lord!

Do you believe in justice?

Justice for all!

¿Yen la nueva vida? (Do you believe in new life?)

¡En su espíritu! (In the Spirit)

¿Quién es su liberación? (Who is your release?)

¡Tú, Señor! (You Lord!)

¡Arriba! ¡Proclamen! ¡Santa Tierra!
We are on holy ground!

Let heaven and earth sing praise
to the one who from death was raised.

Let hearts utter words profound
in proclaiming this holy ground.

Do you believe in freedom?...

Bless earth, water, fire and wind.
Bless your people without, within.

Let beauty and birth surround
in reclaiming this holy ground.

Do you believe in freedom?...

United we join the light.
We are born of the same right.
We've come to release what's bound,
for we are on holy ground.

Do you believe in freedom?...

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Words & Music: Donna Peña

Sending and Blessing

May the love of God enfold us,
the wisdom of Christ enlighten us,
and the fire of the Spirit fill us with passion for the Gospel;
and may the blessing of the holy triune God rest upon us and abide with us, now and
evermore.

Amen.

Rev Kath Merrifield
23 October 2022