

What will YOU do with Jesus?

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 moving into “ordinary time”. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Acknowledgement of Country

From mountain to sea, from sand to red soil we walk the songlines of the Wadi Wadi people. We give thanks for the way they have held this land in their hearts and acknowledge their elders past and present.



Call To Worship –

Our call to worship today is the passage we know as the Benedictus, Luke 1:67-79. These words are prayed around the world in every tongue and every country...

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:
'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up a mighty saviour for us

in the house of his servant David,

as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,

and has remembered his holy covenant,

the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,

to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,

might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness

before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

to give knowledge of salvation to his people

by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,

the dawn from on high will break upon us,

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

Listening for God's Voice

Reading - Luke 23:33-43

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.']] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Reading: Colossians 1:11-20

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Reflection - What will you do with Jesus

Today's reading of the crucifixion reminds us of Jesus trial before Pilate where he turns to the crowd and asks, "What would you have me do with this man?"

Often we make assumptions about people and situations around us- we assume that because of where someone comes from they will think or act in a certain way. We lump people together and they become not men and women but Russians or refugees or Muslims or dole bludgers... you can think of any number of others from the sport you follow to your position on climate change.

Recently I was speaking with some friends when one, involved in ministry in a church started speaking about his faith or lack of it. "Years ago I used to worry about God, I mean, is there really a God? I don't know! But somewhere along the way I've realised that it doesn't really matter. I mean, if it turns out that this is it, lights out, life's over and there's nothing more, I'm ok with that. I wouldn't change anything. I've spent my whole life talking to people about the bible, encouraging them to treat one another with love, to be the best people they can be, that's enough. I'm ok with that."

I couldn't help myself. Having sat in stunned silence as this conversation unfolded, I just couldn't help myself, I had to ask, "But what do you do with Jesus?"

So apparently it is possible to spend your life in ministry, telling people about the love of God without actually believing in the greatest expression of that love!

One way or other it's a question we all have to answer and even if we decide not to decide, that's a decision that we then have to live with, it makes a difference to what we do and how we live.

Pilate asked the priests, the religious authorities of the day and they were quick to answer "Crucify him, we have no king but caesar." They realised that to accept Jesus was to completely undermine their authority, everything they stood for. We look at them and shake our heads, how could they be so blind? But are we any different? We defend our ideas, our traditions, our way of doing things no matter what.

But the question backfires too. Pilate, what will YOU do with Jesus? How many times does he say Jesus is innocent? I find no fault with him... and yet he sends Jesus to be flogged, I find no fault with him, you decide, who do you want me to release? I find no fault with him, I turn my back and wash my hands and my own guards form the crucifixion squad...

We would never do that! Yes, I usually say grace at home but we're in the middle of a big group in a restaurant or club...

And what about those poor guards, unlike the priests and Pharisees, they have no act to grind they're just doing their job, it's what they get paid for. What does it matter? All paths lead to God don't they? Does it really matter what someone believes? Anyway it's not up to me, I have my faith, I'm not responsible for anyone else.

But in the midst of this story are a couple of people we don't often focus on- the thief on the cross and Barrabas. In their own way they both answer the question- they see what the others have missed...

They know that they don't deserve any favors, that they are guilty and deserve their punishment. Did you ever stop to think what would have happened if Barrabas had refused? He could have spat in Pilate's face and said no! Instead he stood by and watched an innocent man walk to the cross- perhaps we have more in common with Barrabas than we realise.

I can't help but wonder if my friend, when the chips are down will find that his airy fairy words actually don't hold...

Today is the feast of Christ the King, a king who comes to the wrong side of town and mixes with all those people on my list of unsavoury types. When people come to him, instead of answering he leaves questions hanging in the air- What do you want me to do? Do you want to be healed? And with the hosts of heaven at his command he staggers under the weight of a cross watches his blood mixing with the dirt of the streets.

What will you do with Jesus? **With another year sitting behind you, who do you say that he is today?**

Responding

Prayer for Others – *using an image of suitcases of all kinds* (Wendy Fenton)

We pray for those in Ukraine, fleeing to places of safety with suitcases packed with the ordinary things of life so they may simply live. Their lives suddenly coming down to one small suitcase, dragged through the snow and rain and bitter cold.

We are reminded of people who have had to flee violence and war in many places – Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, who left with their suitcase of dreams for freedom and for a better life.

We pray especially today for those in immigration detention here in Australia, for those still in PNG and Nauru, and for the Biloela family.

We pray for those whose travel plans have been disrupted these last two years and whose suitcases have gathered dust. We are mindful of those who were not able to travel to be with loved ones in their final days and weeks, those who were separated from family members, those whose lives have been traumatised by loss and grief, particularly for Marie's family at this time.

We pray for those with courage to leave domestic violence situations, who silently and carefully pack their bags to leave, seeking safety and peace of mind.

We pray for those displaced by natural disasters of flood, fire, famine, and those who have no time to pack their bags... We pray for those affected by the devastating floods in Queensland and New South Wales, where suitcases were sodden or washed away, along with everything else in family homes and businesses. We pray for those affected by the climate emergency who have already been displaced from their homes in low lying areas in the Pacific.

We pray for those whose suitcase of dreams has been battered, and for those discarded along the way....

We pray for our own baggage that weighs us down.....

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to the divine, to community, to each other.

Ever present God, you are with us in the hour of need. Bring hope, bring healing.

Stir our compassion and imagination, as we in turn seek our best loving response. Amen.

Offering

How would you like to respond to God's word today? Has something stirred in your heart? Is there something you are thankful for and you want to somehow express that? How will you do that today, tomorrow, next week?

Loving God, Jehovah Jireh, the one who provides everything we need and more, we come, your grateful people wanting to somehow express our thankfulness. Would you take the gifts we bring, would you take our plans and intentions, our thinking and our praying and use everything as a way of sharing your love. Amen.

Sending

Another year is at an end. Who has God been for you? What new names have you discovered? How has Jehovah Jireh provided for you? When did you find Jehovah Rophi being your shepherd? Have there been difficult days when you've had to keep your eyes on Jehovah Nissi, the banner of faithfulness that kept you going? All of this and so much more.

May you go into this week knowing that God is your Peace, your Healer, your Redeemer, your Strength and your Breath, your Vision and your Rest. And may you hear the whisper when someone else needs you to be that voice of God, bringing those same gifts to friend, family and stranger. Amen.

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