

Listening From The Heart

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

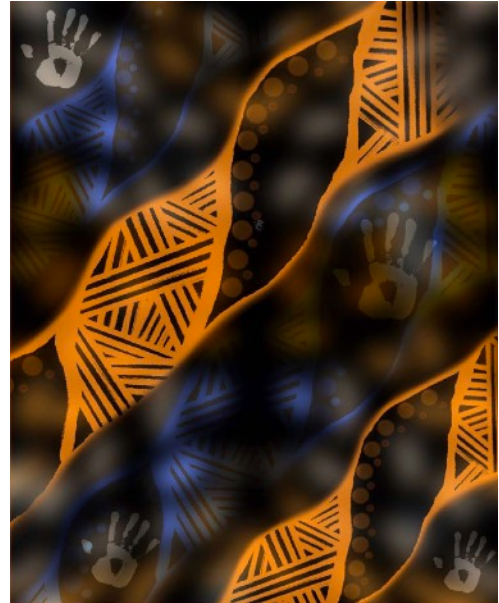
*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **green cloth** or scarf to signify that we are in “ordinary” time - or you might like to have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flag. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Video/Listen - Sing A Song Of Freedom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlb4e3yR5lY>

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.



*Interwoven story-telling
Grace Williams*

Introduction

As we approach Australia Day this week, we acknowledge that this day now brings mixed feelings for us and our community.

Particularly today we acknowledge the pain our indigenous siblings continue to endure. And we commit ourselves to continuing the work of healing, reconciliation and new ways of sharing this land we all call home. Several parts of our service are taken from the worship resources provided for us by the UCA Assembly and the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

Artwork

The image on the screen is called “Interwoven story-telling”. It is by Grace Williams, a Tasmanian indigenous woman, the Community and Cultural Resource Officer with the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. She says this about the image:

“ No matter what the history, this will always be Aboriginal land, our imprint will never be invisible and we will always survive and thrive. Our stories and family lines entwine across seas, lands and skies, forever a united front. ”

*Grace Williams,
Community and Cultural Resource Officer, Leprena - UAICC Tasmania*

Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, breathed life into this Land and her Peoples. From time beyond our reckoning the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have blessed this place through their care and concern.

From river to ocean

from campfire to hearth

may the First Nations who have cared for this land be blessed.

From breath to song

from step to dance

may those who follow your Songlines

guide us on the journey to living honourably in this place.

From greeting to Amen

from silence to chorus

may our worship join with the voices of the First Nations of this Land.

(c) 2017, A.Koh-Butler

Call to Worship

Our land is alive with the glory of God;
desert sands hum and gum trees dance.

Brown grasses sing

and mountains breathe their stillness.

All created things add their rhythms of delight
and even stones rap out their praise.

Let our voices mingle with those of the earth;
may our hearts join the beat of her joy,
for our triune God is with us:
the Source of all being surrounds and upholds us.
Christ Jesus walks beside and before us.
The Spirit moves within and between us.
Blessed be God, our wonder and delight.

Day of Mourning Worship Resources, UCA Assembly, 2023, p.5

Sing - Where Wide Sky Rolls Down (TIS 188)

So we sing our praise of the Creator of this beautiful land we call home.

Where wide sky rolls down and touches
red sand,
where sun turns to gold the grass of the
land,
let spinifex, mulga and waterhole tell
their joy in the One who made everything
well.

Where red gum and creek cross hillside
and plain,
where cool tree-ferns rise to welcome the
rain,
let bushland, farm, mountain-top, all of
their days
delight in the Spirit who formed them for
praise.

Where rain-forest calm meets reef, tide
and storm,
where green things grow lush and oceans
are warm,
let every sea-creature and tropical bird
exult in the light of the life-giving Word.

Now, people of faith, come gather around
with songs to be shared, for blessings
abound!
Australians, whatever your culture or race,
come, lift up your hearts to the Giver of
grace.

Introduction to prayer

Today friends, we are remembering the tragic history of our nation and the violent dispossession of her First Peoples.

Today we mark in lament the truth of our shared history and we lift up to God our prayers for First Peoples and our nation.

We say sorry and we pray for forgiveness, healing and hope.

We also come together and give thanks to God for the grace which enables us to face ourselves and the wrongs in our country and seek healing and be given the courage to repent and seek to mend our wrongs.

The God of all justice,

The God of all peace,

be with you all.

And also with you.

Day of Mourning Worship Resources, UCA Assembly, 2023, p.7

A Blessing - Adnyamathanha language, Flinders Ranges, South Australia

Arrawatanha Ngapala Nguthana

Most High Our Maker

The land you have given us, your children.

Look on this place ...

this special place where you live;

this special place where your glory rests.

Look upon this sacred place

where your name is honoured.

Help us keep it as our Ancestors did.

Althaninda

Happy are you.

Day of Mourning Worship Resources, UCA Assembly, 2023, p.7

Prayer - Invocation

Abba, Father,

Bäpa God,

source of all life,

answer our call,

as a mother responds to the cry of a child in the night.

Jesus Christ,

teacher and friend,

Liberator,

stand beside us

as bearer of our humanity,

and sharer of God's grace.

Creator Spirit,

giver of new life,

purposeful guest,

prod us to praise,

calling us to be a people of hope and faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

Day of Mourning Worship Resources, UCA Assembly, 2023, p.8

Prayer - Lament and Confession

We are called today
We are called to this space
We are called to justice in our grief and in our mourning
Not just for today but all that weeps from today

All that sits in the layers of mourning, embedded in the trail of injustice
Of removal
Of dispossession
Of stolen land
Of stolen children
Of stolen identity
Imposed policies on a sovereign people
Ancestral land,
The mourning as a mother weeps for her child's hand
In the everyday dawning
First Peoples sit in intergenerational mourning
We sit in silence and pray not just in the pain of this day but of all that this day weaves into
- all the mourning, past, present and future

Let us pray..
Creator let us arise:
Arise in justice and truth telling;
Arise in the mourning of the weeping hills ;
Let us mourn -
but in the mourning, let us look to the love that calls us
to seek out and speak out against injustice;
To be present in footprints past;
To be the advocates for change.

Merciful God,
we, the Second Peoples of this land,
lament the injustice and abuse that has so often marked the treatment of the First Peoples
of this land.

***We lament the way in which their land was taken from them and their language,
culture, law and spirituality despised and suppressed.***

***We acknowledge and lament the way in which the Christian church was so often not
only complicit in this process but actively involved in it.***

***We lament that in our own time the injustice and abuse has continued.
We have been indifferent.***

Gracious God, hear our confession —

***We have not loved you with our whole heart,
nor have we loved First Peoples and other neighbours as ourselves.***

***God of mercy, forgive us for our failures, past and present and
give us the grace today to make a fresh start.***

***By your Spirit transform our minds and hearts so that we may love as you have
loved us,***

that we may boldly speak your truth and courageously do your will.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day of Mourning Worship Resources, UCA Assembly, 2023, p.9-10

Words of Assurance

From Isaiah 9:2-4:

- ² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
- ³ You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
- ⁴ For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Sing - Drawn To The Light (v.1 and chorus - twice)

In response we sing words drawn from the words of Isaiah 9 - we'll sing it twice... You might to stand.

People who walk in darkness have sought
a light in the heart of the darkest night.
Just when we thought all would be lost
we are drawn to the light of God.

*Dawn is in sight!
Gone is the night!
Drawn to the light and the morning.
Glorious and bright,
O what a sight to be drawn to the light of God.*

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Listening for God's Voice

Wisdom from the Dreaming - Goon na ghun and Wondangar

<https://www.coomaditchie.org.au/dreaming-stories> (scroll to bottom of page)

Video - President's Message: <https://vimeo.com/780921418>

Reading: Matthew 4:12-25 (Sandra)

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

- ¹⁵ 'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.'

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

¹⁸ As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. ²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. ²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

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

Inviting God, you call us to follow, to witness and to wonder.

You call us to follow and risk all we know so that the change we long for will be seen in our world, our communities, today. Amen.

Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 22 January 2023, p.132

Are we, today, prepared to “risk all that we know so that the change we long for will be seen in our world, our communities, today”?

That’s a hard question, isn’t it?

But isn’t that what the gospel calls us to?

So let’s have a think about what that question is asking?

Are we, today, prepared to “risk all that we know so that the change we long for will be seen in our world, our communities, today”?

First of all, let me just set the scene from our reading today.

In the account of Jesus’ life attributed to Matthew, we pick up the story as Jesus hears news that his cousin, John, has been arrested and he “withdraws” to Galilee (4:12).

Is he concerned for John?

Is he concerned for himself?

Is this the moment he realises that his preaching and teaching will be a threat to some people in positions of power and so pose a threat to his own safety?

Matthew explains his withdrawal with a reference to Isaiah’s prophecy that the light would dawn from among the people of Galilee (4:15-16). From Matthew’s description, Galilee is considered a largely Gentile region - so it is possible that this is a good place for Jesus to “lie low” for a time.

Now - we are going to be dipping in and out of this gospel over the next 12 months so there are a couple of things we need to remember...

First, this gospel was written with a Jewish audience in mind - it is full of references to the Hebrew Scriptures that are used to support the author's understanding of who Jesus is - God's anointed one, the one spoken of by the prophets throughout the ages. And it is written at a time when the Jewish nation is still under the rule of the Roman Empire, likely some time after the temple was destroyed in 70CE. So written to a people who are oppressed and devastated by the destruction of the central symbol of their faith. Also, Matthew's gospel uses the language of "kingdom of *heaven*" rather than "kingdom of *God*" as it appears in other gospels. It may be that this language plays down the explicit reference to Jesus' claim to be God's son in a gospel that emphasises the secrecy that Jesus tried to maintain about his real purpose on earth - this is the gospel that has Jesus time and again telling those who figure it out, not to tell anyone else.

So back to our question:

Are we, today, prepared to "risk all that we know so that the change we long for will be seen in our world, our communities, today"?

And let's start by asking ourselves: what is the change we long for?

Jesus withdraws to Galilee but he keeps preaching or, rather, he takes up John's message (cf Matthew 3:1): 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' (4:17)

A couple of things to notice...

"Repent" - it means "turn around", turn again towards God. It is not about beating yourself or anyone else up about having done the wrong thing. It is about recognising that we are on the wrong path and turning around.

"Kingdom of heaven" - in Matthew's gospel, this is the language used to describe God's way for the world. "The kingdom of heaven *has come near*" also names that whatever it is that God's people are hoping for, longing for, is not some far-off dream, or a place we go after we die - it is here and it is now.

So, turn around, turn towards God, and what you are longing for is right here!

The way of peace and justice and love and healing is right here - within our grasp - amongst and within us.

Are we, willing to risk everything to turn towards it? To turn towards the way God has already shown us? To turn towards God's chosen One, Godself?

The calling of the first disciples in this gospel is free from the miracle of the abundant catch of fish that Luke recounts (Luke 5:1-11), nor does it seem that Simon and Andrew had previously met Jesus (as in John's account (John 1:35ff)). Jesus is simply walking by when he invites Simon and Andrew, James and John, to follow him. The invitation itself is not surprising, it is the invitation of a Rabbi for the men to come and learn from him. What is surprising is their response - they are prepared to, without notice, leave everything (4:22) - everything they have known in terms of their family and work life - to follow this preacher, teacher and healer - who already, it seems, is aware that his ministry is attracting the attention of the poor and powerful alike, for very different reasons.

Matthew gives us another detail (4:23) when he refers to Jesus "teaching in *their* synagogues". It is an early indication of the division in the Jewish community over who Jesus is.

And Jesus' fame spreads as he first of all offers healing to people who are sick, in pain, paralysed, possessed by demons, suffering from epilepsy (4:24) - and great crowds came to him (4:25). Great crowds of people come seeking healing, seeking hope.

Are we, today, prepared to "risk all that we know so that the change we long for will be seen in our world, our communities"?

Today we are recognising that we are at a place in our history, in our nation's history of great opportunity and great change. More than 200 years ago, a powerful nation took control of this land, and in many cases did so violently. We have benefited greatly from the abundant bounty of this land often at the expense of the people who were here first. For too long, we have ignored the First Nations who have cared for this place since time immemorial and we have ignored them when they have pointed out systemic injustice that continues to impact their communities.

Now it is hard to talk about these matters without being "political" so first I want to reclaim the word, political - which comes from the Greek (*politikós*) which means "of the people". Politics, rather than being a battle between particular political parties, is really about how the people, together, discuss, debate and make decisions together.

So, yes, this is political - it is all about how Australians, wherever we have come from, however long we have been here, discuss, debate and make decisions together about the way we want to live together, the kind of community we want to build together and what we do to rectify something we have got wrong.

Today, our First Nations brothers and sisters are calling for us to be actively involved in the campaign for a Voice to Parliament that will put to all of us in a referendum sometime this year. It is a direct response to the Uluru Statement From the Heart - which if you haven't read yet, please take 10 minutes of your time.

Our challenge is to listen deeply - there is divided opinion amongst First Nations peoples. There is a fabulous article in yesterday's Sydney Morning Herald that brings together opinions from a number of different indigenous people.¹

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, the indigenous voice in the Uniting Church, has asked us to support the Voice to Parliament.

I can't tell you how to think - that's not my job - but I can encourage you to listen deeply, to pray, to consider how your understanding of who God calls us to be as a community might speak to us and to our nation at this time, and to ask yourself a question: Are we, today, prepared to "risk all that we know so that the change we long for will be seen in our world, our communities"?

In the online materials I have included a number of links to places you can go to explore the issues raised. There is also a selection of books at the back along with copies of the Uluru Statement, and various statements the Uniting Church has made. You can take any of the statements, but if you want to borrow a book, please put your name on the sheet so I know who has it(!) Alternatively, explore the local library for books written by indigenous authors, look for podcasts - there is plenty out there if you choose to listen.

Let's pray...

God you come to us in our everyday and you invite us to leave all that we know behind in order to join in the future to which you are calling us.

Give us courage.

Give us wisdom.

Help us to be involved in the coming of your way amongst us. Amen.

¹ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/raising-indigenous-voices-on-a-voice-to-parliament-20221213-p5c604.html>

Some websites to explore:

Statement from the Heart - education and information about the Voice to Parliament

<https://fromtheheart.com.au/education/#/>

[https://ulurustatemdev.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/](https://ulurustatemdev.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/UluruStatementfromtheHeartPLAINTEXT.pdf)

[UluruStatementfromtheHeartPLAINTEXT.pdf](#)

Walking Together - UCA Assembly - with links to all kinds of resources - videos, reading,

conversations: <https://uniting.church/walkingtogether/>

In particular, click on “Living The Covenant Locally”

UCA Covenant Statement: <https://resources.uca.org.au/images/resources/Covenanting/Covenant-with-UAICC-A2-poster.pdf>

Revised preamble: <https://resources.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/item/668-the-revised-preamble>

Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation:

<https://www.coomaditchie.org.au/>

Responding

Sing - Aboriginal Lord’s Prayer

You are our Father, you live in heaven,
we talk to you, Father you are good.

We believe your word, Father,
we are your children,
give us bread today.

We have done wrong, we are sorry,
teach us, Father, all about your word.

Others have done wrong to us
and we are sorry for them, Father, today.

Stop us from doing wrong, Father,
save us all from the evil one.

You are our Father, you live in heaven,
we talk to you, Father you are good.

*Words © Broome Catholic Diocese
Music © Tiwi Community WA*

Prayer for Others (Michele Broad)

Loving Eternal Father,

We are always learning and changing through history. Things our society once accepted are shown to be wrong and unjust and we seek to change. Thank you Father for this capacity to learn and grow.

Forgive us for our slowness to see and help us, as your people, to bring your light and love into the world.

We think of people with a disability and how change is finally being confronted to provide greater recognition, access, acceptance and opportunity. We pray that the commission exposing so much endemic failure will bring forth change that will enable people to live full lives, that abuse will be routed out and that greater opportunities for work will be provide.

Father, we live our lives trusting you and seeking to live as Jesus showed us, yet so many live with the fear and devastation of domestic violence. We pray for your wisdom in healing this pain and abuse across our communities. Enable those working in the field to bring new life to broken people. Give us all the eyes and ears to hear and see the need and not walk by those in need.

Help us to build a society that deals with anger and fear in healthy ways.

*Give us the courage to
accept the realities of our history
so that we may build a better future for our nation.
Teach us to respect all cultures.
Teach us to care for our land and waters.*

*Help us to share justly the resources of this land.
Help us to bring about spiritual and social change
to improve the quality of life
for all peoples in our communities,
especially the disadvantaged.
Help all young people to find true dignity and self-esteem by your Spirit.*

*May your power and love
be the foundations on which we:
walk together as First and Second Peoples; and
build our families, our communities and our nation.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Day of Mourning Worship Resources, UCA Assembly, 2023, p.12

Offering

As we have received, so we consider our response...

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!

We are called to follow, yet are often slow to respond, God of grace.

We are blessed with more than we ever need or can use, yet we are reluctant to part with even a portion of this abundance.

As we offer our gifts to you,

remind us that learning generosity is part of our call to follow the One who models your gracious nature in every word, every gesture, every day. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 22 January 2023, p.136

Sending

Sing - Deep Stillness (ATW 494)

For you, deep stillness of the silent inland;
For you, deep blue of the desert skies;
For you, flame red of the rocks and stones;
For you, sweet water from hidden springs.

From the edges, seek the heartlands,
And when you're burnt by the journey
May the cool winds of the hovering Spirit
Soothe and replenish you.
In the name of Christ.

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Sending and Blessing

Go now, beloved,
to follow the love of God
to be surprised by God's wonder
to lift your voice for love and compassion.
Dare to believe that you are people [capable] of healing and grace.
Feel God's encouragement to be a blessing
as you offer blessings with your heart and hands
and know that you never, ever go alone.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 22 January 2023, p.136

And the blessing of God, the ancient of Days;
Jesus, the embodiment of God's justice; and
the Spirit, animator of Creation
be with you and remain with you always. Amen.

Day of Mourning Worship Resources, UCA Assembly, 2023, p.13

Rev Kath Merrifield
22 January 2023