

God's Reign Among Us

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

Listen - Renew Our World (Tearfund)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKrTO0x_aYA

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.



Introduction

Weak or strong,
old or young,
hungry and thirsty or filled to the brim,
weeping or filled with joy,
I pray that God will meet you right where you are and embrace you in inbounding love and grace.

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.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders, past and present and emerging, and we pray for the future of their communities.

May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.

(c) 2017, A.Koh-Butler, This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here

Call to Worship

Friends, come!

Gather around deep insight.

Feed on words of unusual wisdom,

seeing before us an unfolding vision of a renewed and just world
as close and real as our breathing.

Come!

Open your ears and hearts and lives as Jesus paints a vision for the world that challenges our expectations and invites us into ways of being that turns the power dynamic of this world on its head.

Let's pray...

Open to your Spirit
and alive to the Christ,
who was, who is, and who comes,
we gather in thanksgiving, O God.
We offer you our adoration,
our acclaim,
and our very lives as we sing.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Epiphany 4, 29 January 2023, p.146

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

And so we sing - our prayer, our invitation to God to come amongst us as we invite one another and all of creation to join in the song:

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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Prayer

Come, O God of all the earth,
as we wonder at the beauty and power of your creation that we get to experience in this place every day,
in the wind and the waves,
in the fertile soils of the valleys,
so move amongst us, inspiring our wonder
and strengthening our resolve to live in ways that reflect your love and beauty into the world around us.
Fill our mouths with a song of praise - like the song of the birds who shout your praise from early morning to late into the evening.

“Come, O Justice, come, O Peace,
come and shape our hearts anew.”
Open us to the wisdom you disperse throughout your creation,
give us ears to hear and hearts to respond.

So often we get caught up in conversations and debates and in our eagerness to be liked, we agree with what we hear before we have thought about it...

We have heard it said:

It's just common sense.
Self-protection at all costs.
Conquer or be conquered.
Charity begins at home;
and we often believe without thinking.

We have heard it said:

Of course, our culture is superior.
Warheads make for peace and security.
Wealth will buy happiness.
Celebrities are role models;
and we often believe without thinking.

We have heard it said:

Nothing can be done to change that.
The poor will always be with us.
I am not my brother or sister's keeper.
Tears are for women and children;
and we often believe without thinking.

God of surprises and non-convention,
grace us with a vulnerability and openness
to hear the wise and lyrical voice of Jesus anew.
May our way of seeing, thinking, acting, and responding
be changed in light of Jesus' great love of you
and the world of your making. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Blessed ones,
the God who gathers us together with words of peace and hope,
is the same God who renews grace and peace within us now.
We are a loved and forgiven people.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Epiphany 4, 29 January 2023, pp146-7

Sing - Called By Earth and Sky (Seasons 6-12)

We sing a song reminding us of who we are called to be.

*Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.*

Precious these waters, endless seas,
deep ocean's dreams.
Waters of healing, rivers of rain,
the wash of love again.

Called by earth and sky...

Precious this gift, the air we breathe,
wind born and free.
Breath of the Spirit blow through this place,
our gathering, and our grace.
Called by earth and sky...

Precious these mountains, ancient sands,
vast, fragile land.

Seeds of our wak'ning, rooted and strong,
creation's faithful song.
Called by earth and sky...

our faith and justice one.
Called by earth and sky...

Precious the fire that lights the way,
bright the dawning day.
Fire of passion, sorrows undone,

Words and Music © Pat Mayberry SOCAN

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the Lord says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

² Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the Lord has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

³ 'O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

⁵ O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.'

⁶ 'With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'

⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- 4 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- 5 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- 6 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- 7 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- 8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- 9 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- 10 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 11 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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!

Sing - Be God's (Season 9-10)

This song echoes Jesus words in Matthew 5, inviting us to consider how we respond in the various kinds of situations we find ourselves in.

Where the world is merciless,
 be God's mercy.

Where the world is hopeless,
 be God's hope.

Where there is injustice, be God's justice.

Where there is sadness, be God's joy.

Where the world is doubting,
 be God's faith.

Where there is ingratitude,
 be God's grace.

Where there is confusion, be God's truth.

Where there is weakness,
 be God's strength.

*Let your life change the world one person
 at a time.*

*Let your life be the presence of our Lord
 Jesus Christ.*

*As the bread becomes his body, we can be
 the living sign.*

*With God's love, change the world with
 your life.*

Where the world is wounded,
 be God's healing.

Where the world is weeping,
 be God's song.

Where there is despairing,
 be God's beauty.

Where the world is crumbling,
 be God's rock.

Where there is no tenderness,
 be God's child.

Where there is loneliness, be God's smile.

Where the world is dying, be God's life.

Where there is darkness, be God's light.

Let your life change the world... (x2)

*Words and music: Danielle Rose.
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Reflection

Prayer for Justice

Holy Spirit of God,
You are the restless breath of love that sweeps through the world.
You move where you will, breaking down barriers,
Stirring hearts to change, making all things possible.
Inspire each one of us to hunger and thirst for justice!

Come, Spirit of God,
Sweep through our world bringing the changes we so long for and even more that we have
yet to imagine.
May the bounty of your goodness be shared more justly,
So all may share in the rich blessings of your creation.
And, for us, bring transformation in our praying and living,
So that we may act justly, love mercy,
And walk humbly with you all the days of our lives. Amen.

Adapted from:

~ posted on the Third Space website. <http://third-space.org.uk/blog>
[https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Epiphany 4 A](https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Epiphany%204%20A)

Last week we heard Jesus say, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”; the kingdom of heaven is here (Matthew 4:17). And we talked about the kind of community, the kinds of values, that reflect that kingdom, God’s reign, God’s way, God’s dream. As Matthew’s gospel moves on, the gospel-writer records several chunks of Jesus’ teaching - and this first chunk, Matthew 5-7 has come to be known as the “Sermon on the Mount”. And the beginning of this chunk of teaching holds a vision of the community to which we are called, and speaks directly to our character.

These passages, both, from Micah and from the gospel attributed to Matthew are pretty well known. Micah’s words, particularly the last verse (6:8) has become a bit of a catch-cry for various social action groups. And Jesus’ teaching, this first part, has become known as the Beatitudes (meaning “blessed”).

Let’s look first at Micah.

Micah is one of the later prophets, speaking to a nation who is now doing it a bit tough. The southern kingdom of Judah had not been exiled like their northern neighbours but they had been invaded. But once the invaders had retreated, King Hezekiah had overseen dramatic growth in the kingdom - there had been a great increase in the population, the economy had transformed from a reliance on bartering to international trading, literacy rates had risen.¹

But that also meant that there had been an increase in corruption and, as we know, as wealth increases, those unable to keep up, the poor and vulnerable in the community were being ignored. Have a look at what Micah says about all that in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 6 is set in a kind of courtroom, where God is basically saying to the people of the southern kingdom - what do you have to say for yourselves? I have brought you out of Egypt, stood by you and cared for you, and look at what you have now become! (6:4-5)

So what should they do?

Burnt offerings and religious piety are not going to cut it! (6:6-7)

¹ <https://johntsquires.com/2023/01/27/justice-kindness-and-humility-micah-6-epiphany-4a/>

In the midst of what feels like turmoil and upheaval, Micah reminds them of their covenant, with their God. This God, who has held you and shaped you, saved you and cared for you has already shown you.

What matters is how you live - *do* justice, *love* kindness, *walk* humbly with God (6:8).

These are active, practical things.

Do justice - don't just pray for it, don't just demand it, *do* justice yourself - and I don't mean the kind of justice that issues punishment for wrong-doing. We've talked about that before. God's justice is all about restored relationships. Do whatever it takes, whatever needs to be done, to restore relationships.

Love kindness or, in some translations, mercy - the Hebrew here is both - be kind, be merciful - in our actions, in our words, most especially in our words.

Walk humbly with God - humility is so hard for so many of us - we can be humble on our own terms, when it doesn't cost us anything, and humility is very much undervalued in our society - but gee it is tempting sometimes to want to blow our own trumpet, especially when dealing with someone who is blowing their own...

But if we are in any doubt about what kind of character God is calling us to grow into, the Beatitudes make it even more plain. Jesus is speaking to his disciples - but it becomes clear that the crowds are gathering and listening in. Luke also records this first part of Jesus' teaching (Luke 6:17-26), although he makes them much more direct.

"Blessed" (Gk = *μακάριοι*) - it isn't the best word for us today - not easily translated into English. "Blessed" for us, as we have seen recently by the then Prime Minister who got himself into a pickle when he suggested he was blessed - seems to carry now something of the sense of a reward which isn't what the Greek means. Some translations use "happy" - happy are the poor - but that is even less satisfactory.

Perhaps something like "content" is closer.

So rather than thinking of this series of statements as God offering a reward to those who are poor or grieving or if we are meek and so on, perhaps we can think of them more as painting a picture for us of how God intends for us, as a community, as individuals, to care for each other.

So those who are poor or persecuted are held in the embrace of love (5:3,10) - we hold them, we ensure that they know they belong.

Those who mourn are comforted (5:4) - we comfort them, we show up for them and show we care.

We celebrate the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers rather than putting them down or dismissing their presence amongst us because these people point us to God (5:5,7,8,9).

We ensure that those who give their lives for the pursuit of righteousness, encouraging us all to be better, to care more deeply, to seek forgiveness and healing and reconciliation, we ensure that they are supported and nurtured (5:6)

And when we ourselves are persecuted for the people we embrace or the stand we take, well we know we are on the right track (5:12). So we hang in there, we support one another, and we encourage one another to stay the journey.

Each of these statements invites us to think about our own character - how we respond in different circumstances and to the differences in many the people we encounter from day to day. It has been said that these statements might be thought of as the "Be-attitudes" - and teach us to develop our character, our *attitudes* along lines of compassion, meekness, mercy, creators of peace, yearning for righteousness and purity of heart.

Or as Micah puts it: justice, kindness, humility.

How well do we reflect these attitudes in our lives - in the things we do, *and* in the things we say?

My guess is that we all do OK when things are going well - but we begin to struggle when confronted with differences or people or situations that we are not entirely comfortable with, when we are pushed beyond our safe experiences.

We become less confident, sometimes even fearful, and it is easy to speak with less care both to one another and to our friends and neighbours.

Last week we recognised that our nation still struggles with its relationship with the First Nations of this land. Perhaps some of you were confronted by saying sorry or recognising that we continue to benefit from systemic injustice that impacts our indigenous brothers and sisters most directly.

What does it mean for us to be people of justice, kindness and humility?

What does it mean for us to be meek, merciful, peacemakers?

How can we remain curious with one another, listening deeply to the hearts that learn for righteousness, working it out with one another?

In the midst of a changing world, in the midst of corruption and the threat of being overwhelmed, Micah speaks to God's people, to us; Jesus teaches his disciples, you and I; to return to who it is that God calls us and intends for us to be - people who embody the justice of God, and God's kindness and humility, who seek to grow in ourselves as individuals and as a community, the kind of attitudes and values Jesus teaches and embodies.

Perhaps this week, you might take some time, to write down the words from Micah 6:8 and/or Matthew 5 - highlight the attitudes or aspects of character that stand out for you, and spend some time reflecting on the ones you can celebrate in yourself - and give thanks to God for them; and then spend some time reflecting on the ones you might need help with - and ask God to help with those. And if you are unsure, talk them over with a trusted friend - try to stay open and curious, and let God's Spirit lead you.

To help us remember, we are going to learn a song...

Responding

Sing - What Does Our God Require Of Us (Seasons 3-10)

<https://strathdeemusic.com/WhatRequire.html>

What does our God require of us?

Justice, kindness, walk humbly with our God.

To seek justice, and love kindness and walk humbly with our God.

Words and Music by Jim Strathdee
© 1986 by Desert Flower Music

Prayer for Others

God of all goodness,

by glimpsing something of your vision of a just and merciful world,

we become acutely aware of how much inhumanity and suffering still exists in the world.

It would overwhelm us if it were not for the tender beauty and hope that arises each new morning and shimmers from the heavens at night.

And so from graced places of gratitude and wonder we pray:

For Earth staggering under the weight of global warming and deforestation,

together, may we see and find another way.

For people staggering under the weight of poverty, violence, and loss,
together, may we see and find another way.

For nations staggering under the weight of pride and a need to impose their will,
together, may we see and find another way.

And for the Christian Church staggering under the weight of seeming irrelevance within secular cultures,
together, may we see and find another way.

We pray particularly for the people we know who are unwell at this time. May they know your healing.

We pray for those who are nearing the end of their time here on earth and for their families as they keep watch and wait. May they know your comfort and assurance.

We pray for people caught in the violence of conflict and war - in the streets, in their homes, in their communities. May they know your peace.

We pray, especially today, may your kingdom come on earth as you intended it to be.

God of all, honour the desires in our hearts and may they flourish within the people of grace and compassion we seek to be.

Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 29 January 2023, p.148

And so we pray in the words Jesus taught us - and you might like to say this prayer either as it is on the screen or in the version or language that is closest to your heart:

***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 in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

***For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

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 worshiping together.

We are glad you are here!

Let us pray...

The poor struggle to put food on the table, the meek are bullied in the schoolyards, the mourners find no comfort in hollow words, and peacemakers are publicly ridiculed by those who should be emulating them. So, as we offer our gifts to you, Gracious God, we pray you would use what we offer to bring blessings to all in this world. Amen.

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Sending

Sing - We Are Companions on the Journey (Seasons 8-8)

We sing a song that reminds us and affirmed that we are all in this together:

*We are companions on the journey,
breaking bread and sharing life;
and in the love we bear is the hope we
share
for we believe in the love of our God,
we believe in the love of our God.*

We have been gifted with each other,
and we are called by the Word of the Lord:
to act with justice, to love tenderly,
and to walk humbly with our God,
to walk humbly with our God.

We are companions on the journey...

(repeat)

No longer strangers to each other,
no longer strangers in God's house;
we are fed and we are nourished
by the strength of those who care,
by the strength of those who care.

We are companions on the journey...

Words and Music: Carey Landry

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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. Amen.

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Rev Kath Merrifield
29 January 2023