



Knowing God

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

Video - All Of This Is Us

<https://vimeo.com/599454567>

Light Candle

We light this candle, inviting us into its light.

And we allow ourselves to be drawn to its flame.

And as we do, we look to Jesus, the light of the world,
a light that shines even in the darkest of times offering hope
and healing.

Christ is risen

Christ is risen indeed!

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

Gathering - Call To Worship

Mothers' Day, as we know it in Australia, has its roots in the American Civil War.

In 1870, Julia Ward Howe called upon women across America to demand an end to war.

If you think feminism and/or the peace movement were born in the 1970s, let me assure you that Julia got in 100 years before! Let me read a part of what she wrote:

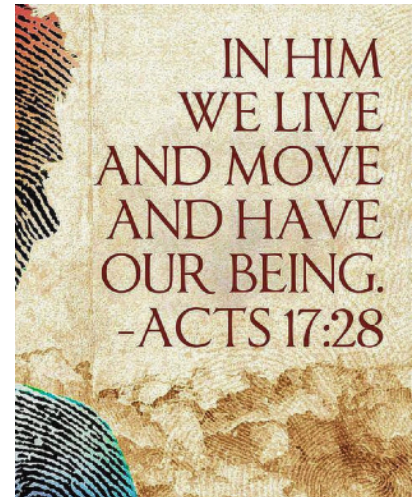
Arise, then, Christian women of this day !

Arise, all women who have hearts,

Whether your baptism be that of water or of tears !

Say firmly :

We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies.



Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.
Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of
charity, mercy and patience.

We, women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country, to allow our sons
to be trained to injure theirs.

*Julia Ward Howe, Appeal To Womanhood Throughout The World,
Boston, September 1870*

Julia believed that women had a responsibility to engage in political action to shape their
societies, and so she asked for a day of peace to be observed annually on 2 June.
Whilst that idea didn't catch on, in 1908, Anna Jarvis, whose mother had been an
associate of Julia Ward Howe, held a memorial to remember the death and celebrate the
life of her own mother. It was this celebration that captured the imagination of her
community.

So Mother's Day was intended to sit somewhere between honouring these amazing
women and remembering the cause of peace that they worked for.

Sadly, Anna spent a good deal of her later life fighting off Hallmark and other commercial
operators who sought to commercialise the day...

So today, we pause to remember our mothers and those women who have nurtured us
throughout our lives. We give thanks to God for them.

We also remember and hold people whose memories of their mother is not a happy one -
whether because of sickness, abandonment, mental illness, violence or addiction - we
pray that you will know God's comfort and healing.

We think of women who have lost children to illness, accident, addiction, suicide or
violence.

We think of women who have longed for children and women without children of their own
who have offered their hearts and homes to others.

Whether joy-filled or a struggle, we pray together that God's love and grace will surround
us all.

Prayer

We come together, O God,
aware that this day brings great joy for many,
deep sadness for some,
and perhaps mixed feelings for others.
Hold us all in your grace, we pray.

We come together, O God,
we lift our voices in song,
we hear our voices harmonise with others,
and we tune our hearts to love.

We come together today, O God,
to find welcome and affirmation,
to be seen and heard and become aware of the warmth, the breath,
the life we share.

The spirit of Christ abides in the shared space between us.

May we inhale deeply of this sacred presence
and exhale words and actions of godly love.

May the Spirit bring us together and bring us back to life. Amen.

Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Easter 6, 14 May 2023, p.162

Sing - Creator and Poet (Seasons 3-10)

Let's stand and sing our song of praise to the one who shapes us and holds us.

Father and Mother,
creator and poet,
speaking your wisdom in forest and glade:
telling your glory in ocean and river,
pouring your pleasure on all you have
made.

Christ of the cosmos, you sang into being,
galaxies spinning through measureless
space;
coming among us, and sharing our
weakness;
singing your songs of redemption and
grace.

Spirit, you danced at the dawn of creation,
rising, rejoicing on jubilant wings.
Yours is the rhythm of cycle and season,
yours is the heartbeat of all living things.

God, you have made us of stardust and
spirit.
Etching your image on ev'ry cell.
We are your love song, your poem and
rhythm.
All co-creators, your story to tell.

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Prayer

Creator God, indeed your wisdom, your presence is known in the world around us.
The oceans roar and rivers babble your praise.
Forests, deserts, grassy paddocks and swampy marshes all reveal your wonder in ways
that make us catch our breath and gasp in awe.
As you sing us into being,
as this season cycles through the end of autumn and heads towards winter,
as we are tempted to hunker down,
draw us into your world of wild winds and cooler days,
remind us that all of this also reveals something of your wonder,
teach us again to sing your song of love.

Confession

Forgiving One, unseen yet known,
it has been another long week where many have felt unloved and unnoticed.
We have done our best.
We have loved even when we have felt lost.
We have been gracious when we have felt ignored.

Forgiving One, seeing and forgiving, knowing and loving,
we turn away from this hurt and frustration to find again the grace we all need to love
again.
Hear us.
Forgive us. Amen.

Words of Assurance

No one has seen God.
Yet Jesus has shown us God, and God is love.
God is the love that we find in community
and the commandment we hold together.
You are loved. We are loved. All is forgiven. All is love.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Easter 6, 14 May 2023, p.163

Sing - Spirit Come (Seasons 8-36)

As God's Spirit moves amongst us, we open ourselves inviting the Spirit to come...

Spirit come, (*Spirit come*)
Spirit come, (*Spirit come*)
Open our eyes,
open our hearts,
come Spirit, come.

Chosen to bring good news
to ev'ryone poor, abused.
We are your hands,
we are your voice,
Spirit come.
To captives we shout, proclaim
freedom in Jesus' name.
Fill us with love,
fill us with power,
Sprit come.
Spirit come...

Good news that blind can see,
oppressed ones can now be free.
We are your hands,
we are your voice,
Spirit come.
Announcing the time's arrived
when God will save people's lives.
Fill us with love,
fill us with power,
Sprit come.
Spirit come...

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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Acts 17:22-34

²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring."

²⁹Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

³² When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' ³³At that point Paul left them. ³⁴But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Reading: John 14:15-21

¹⁵ 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

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 - In God We Live And Move (Seasons 9-24)

Learn a simple two-part almost chant-like song...

In God we live and move and have our being.

In God we live and move, we live...

Bruce Harding

Reflection

Holy God, lift our gaze and open our hearts, that we might see your love all around.

As we have sung, may we be aware of your presence in every moment of our living and in every fibre of our being.

May your abiding presence encourage us to love more. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Easter 6, 14 May 2023, p.160

So Paul has been causing trouble.

He, Timothy and Silas had been preaching about Jesus in the synagogue in Thessalonica. While some of the Jewish people had been persuaded and joined them, along with a good many Greeks and some "leading women", the Jewish leaders had become upset and caused a riot in the city (Acts 17:1-5).

So the early church sent Paul and Silas off to a place called Beroea where they again preached in the synagogue. Apparently the Jews in Beroea were more receptive than the good folk in Thessalonica, but when the Jewish leaders of Thessalonica heard about it, they went to Beroea and stirred up a riot there too. So the early church leaders sent Paul off to Athens (Acts 17:10-15).

So here he is, wandering the streets of Athens, a vibrant, thriving city, where ideas from all parts of the world were on show and actively discussed. The author of Acts tells us that Paul was "deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16). So we get this sense of almost culture shock in Paul as he looks around and sees all these idols. So he begins to debate or "argue" with the Jewish leaders in the synagogue and with the philosophers and people of others faiths in the market place who engaged with him and asked him more questions (Acts 17:17-21).

And we pick up the story as Paul stands in front of the Areopagus.

Now I should say it is a bit contested whether the Areopagus, at this time in Athen's history, is an actual place or a Council of some kind. Of course the tourist guides will want to point you to a place quite near the Acropolis and tell you that Paul stood there, but there is some argument that this was actually a group of people, a Council, perhaps of traders or philosophers or city leaders of some kind.

So this is a question to Paul to give an account of his teaching in order that they can decide whether this new religion should be permitted within the city.

So the language Paul uses to respond, is very much based in the style of philosophical debate.

But let's look at what he does.

First, Paul begins where they are at, recognising their commitment to matters of faith and worship.

"Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way." (17:22)

I've seen your idols and I noticed this inscription: 'To an unknown god' (17:23).

And then he draws on some common ground:

The God who created the heavens and the earth. (17:24)

The God who created humanity. (17:26)

The God who we humans search for but is not so far away from us. (17:27)

He draws on their own poetry: "for 'in him we live and move and have our being'" and we are God's children (17:28).

And it is from that base that he then tells them about the God he knows in Jesus.

By establishing the common ground, you can almost picture the crowd nodding so far, he draws them in; by respecting their understanding, he is given permission to then take them in a different direction.

So if we are God's children, he says, then God can't be an idol of stone or silver or gold (17:29).

And this God calls us to repent - to turn around, to turn back to the way God has shown us in the resurrection of Jesus (17:30-31).

Of course, this idea, this conviction that someone had been raised from the dead was contentious - some scoffed, but others believed and joined Paul (17:32-33).

And isn't that still true today?

The idea of resurrection is hard to take in.

Even though we see evidence of new life all around us, all the time - we see it in the green shoots emerging from the black soot of the burnt bush, in the emerging of new growth in springtime, even in our own lives, we see hope emerging from despair when a new job begins or a new treatment for an illness becomes available, when we ride out the storms of life that come and go - yet in the depths of our despair, or in the comfort of our complacency, hope in resurrection is pushed aside.

Paul reminds us that God's intention for us, God's dream for the world, is fulfilled in resurrection.

In the same way, as Jesus sits with his friends and disciples on the night he was betrayed, the night before he died, he reassures them of his ongoing presence with them they would never be alone (14:18).

He promises them, he promised us, the presence of the "Advocate", "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17). Now this Advocate (Greek is *παράκλητον* (*paraklete*)) is not the image of a gentle, peace-dove, the Advocate is an agitator (think, someone with a megaphone demanding attention), someone who perhaps could be quite confronting for us, waking us up to our own deceptions or the deceptions of our culture or the church, and calling us to

change. This is one who speaks the truth to us - perhaps names the stuff we don't want to face, disrupting our complacency. And this Advocate is not some external voice or force, the Advocate is strangely, perhaps even deeply, familiar, the Advocate "abides" in us (14:17). It is that voice within us that names our fears and challenges us to return ourselves to God's way and to call others into the depth of Love embodied in Jesus.

"On that day," Jesus says, "you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (14:20). It almost echoes in the words that Paul draws on, "In God we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28).

And in this intimate knowing of God, the parent, and Jesus, the child, we are drawn to love - to love God, to love Jesus, and as Jesus continues in his words to his disciples, to love one another.

If you have delved into the other readings set down for us this week in the Lectionary, you will have come across 1 Peter 3, where we read a familiar text encouraging us to "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15-16)

One of the greatest challenges for the church today, I think, is how we frame the story of Jesus and the kind of language we use. Too many of us have been guilty of a distinct lack of respect and gentleness in how we tell others about Jesus, or, at least, in the way we tell others they should live, apparently, because of Jesus. Part of our challenge is that there is a very loud Christian voice in the world today that is often condemning and angry and quite rightly, people switch off from it or reject it outright. And the rest of us, too often, fall silent because we don't want to offend anyone.

But Paul's speech in Acts 17 gives us a great example of how we might engage with the world around us.

There is nothing here about telling people they are sinners and all going to hell - an all too familiar and deeply hurtful approach, in my humble opinion. There is nothing here about imposing shame or even naming ignorance.

What Paul does is to recognise the hunger, the searching that many of us have - perhaps today it is a searching for purpose or meaning - and he locates that searching, that hunger in the God of Jesus.

One of my favourite conversations begins when someone tells me, often very confidently, that they don't believe in "all that sky fairy stuff". And I can respond by saying, something like, "neither do I - so tell me more about the God you don't believe in and perhaps you'll let me tell you about the God I know - not some old man on a cloud - but the One who knows us intimately and offers hope and peace and life in all its fullness."

Perhaps the challenge for us today is to do the hard work of finding common ground with our unbelieving or sceptical friends and family. And to find a way into a conversation that is so often shut down through shame or ignorance - to find our way into the conversation with respect and gentleness - to learn to be curious and to ask questions of each other - to name our doubt and fear and to claim our hope and conviction in the resurrection of Jesus.¹

¹ I am grateful to Sally Douglas and Robin Whitaker for their discussion of these readings on the podcast, *By The Well*: <https://bythewell.com.au/episodes/a226-easter-6>

Let's pray...

Spirit of God, we know you are with us, Jesus promised us that.

So, open our ears and hearts and minds to your advocacy, to your truth-telling - for us and for the world.

Give us courage to share the hope we know in Jesus with the people around us.

Teach us to share such hope with gentleness and respect.

And as we do, may our being be so transformed that the world will come to know and share in your boundless love. In hope, we pray. Amen.

Responding

Sing - We Give Thanks (Seasons 3-44)

As we come to God's table, let's give thanks...

We give thanks for the goodness of love that is shared.

We give thanks for this table around which we are fed.

We give thanks for this circle of friends and family.

We give thanks, we give thanks, and we give thanks.

We give thanks for this offering of bread and of wine.

We give thanks for these blessings from earth and of vine.

We give thanks for this gathering of symbol, sign and song.

We give thanks, we give thanks, we give thanks.

We give thanks for tomorrow and thanks for today.

We give thanks for the journey and faith along the way.

We give thanks for the promise of Jesus with us now.

We give thanks, we give thanks, and we give thanks.

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Holy Communion

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join with us in-person, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you.

Prayer for Others (Helen Laidlaw)

Let us pray:

Today I direct my prayers to our Mother/Father God who has cared for us always.

It is Mothers' Day when we remember all that has been done for us over the years by our mothers.

I thank you for Jesus' mother who was for him always and even at his Crucifixion, where Jesus asked John, his disciple, to care for her.

All of us had mothers – even the men here today – and we give thanks for their love and care. We may not always have agreed with them, but we pray for forgiveness if we hurt them in any way. I pray for the fathers here who have supported their children's mothers with love and generosity. As our culture changes many mothers work outside the home and they need more support and recognition of the need for rest.

There are so many issues of being a mother which have not been openly discussed. It is now recognised that 1 in 5 mothers have some post-natal depression. I pray for those mothers as they battle through this period. We thank you that there is more recognition of the condition, that helping agencies like Tresillian exist and there is a lessening of shame. I also pray for mothers who have trouble conceiving or who lose their babies through miscarriage.

I also pray for mothers who have been abandoned or abused or needed an abortion. I pray for mothers who have lost a child through illness, accidents or even suicide. A broken heart always aches. And I pray for mothers whose children have chosen to ignore them and harbour grudges. I pray for wisdom, patience and reconciliation for those mothers.

I pray for mothers with a child or children with disabilities which require constant care - forever. Give them strength and may we be aware of their needs, whether it is offering acceptance, or a chance to have a break away, or encouraging the Government to recognise the need for greater assistance.

I also pray for foster carers who are offering love and care to children who aren't theirs by birth, but are willing to put their own freedom aside. I also pray for the foster children as often life has been traumatic and it is hard for them to trust again.

We are daily bombarded with pictures of mothers in Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Ukraine, Turkey and Syria who are facing famine, or mourning the loss of their children. Help us to see their need as our responsibility.

And lastly I thank you for the mothering we take for granted in our church family, where at the moment women are the Elders and many of the pastoral partners. Bless them all!

In Jesus name we pray, 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 to God's nudging today.

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 God together. We are glad you are here!

God, whose children we are, receive these gifts we offer.
May they help bring others closer to you,
and to experience and appreciate your presence in their lives. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Easter 6, 14 May 2023, p.164

Sending

Sing - Sent Forth By God's Blessing (TIS 531)

So we begin our transition into the world God loves. We sing of how we are strengthened by this time together and will respond in active love.

Sent forth by God's blessing, our true faith
confessing,
the people of God from his table take
leave.

The supper is ended: may now be
extended
the fruits of his service in all who believe.
The seed of his teaching, our hungry souls
reaching,
shall blossom in action for all humankind.
His grace shall incite us, his love shall
unite us
to work for his kingdom, his purpose to
find.

With praise and thanksgiving to God ever-
living
the task of our everyday life we will face,
our faith ever sharing, in love ever caring,
embracing as neighbours all those of each
race.

One feast that has fed us, one light that
has led us,
unite us as one in his life that we share.
Then may all the living, with praise and
thanksgiving,
give honour to Christ and his name that we
bear.

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Sending and Blessing

We go in God and God in us,
blessed and filled with the promise of life.
God sends us into the world to love.

So as you go from this place,
each time you look into the heart of another, try and recognise the touch of God.
each time you look into the face of another, try and recognise the Christ within.
each time you hear the words of another, listen for the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

And be blessed in the name of God, the source of all life and inspiration.
Be blessed in the name of the Christ whose life liberates our expectations.
Be blessed in the name of the Spirit as she breathes new life through us all. Amen.

Adapted, Keree Casey, Of Ash and Rainbows, pp70 and 72

Liturgy adapted from material from:
Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Lent-Easter 2023

Rev Kath Merrifield
14 May 2023