



Learning From Sacred Stories

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 because we are now in "ordinary" time or a time of "growing together". Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Video - *Come As You Are (UME)*

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8776115/video/592533761>

Introduction

Today marks the end of NAIDOC Week. While NAIDOC Week gives us an opportunity to intentionally celebrate the contributions of our indigenous brothers and sisters to our communities, I hope that we won't leave our celebrations there. May we continue to engage intentionally and strengthen our commitment to learning and growing together.

Light Candle

Jesus said:

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

We light this candle, and we are invited to be drawn to its flame,

just as God draws us to Godself.

So we take a deep breathe and know ourselves loved and held.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, [God our Creator], 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,

those who have carried the sacred stories throughout the ages,
those who carry the sacred stories today,

and those who are learning and growing so that the stories may be carried into the future.

We pray for their communities and we pray for that our hearts, minds and hands will be open as we shape a future together.

May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.



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2023. www.seasonsonline.ca,
www.woodlake.com.

*Adapted from © 2017, A.Koh-Butler,
This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.*

Call To Worship

From the whirlwind of the week,

we come to find rest.

From all that feels unknown and uncertain,

we come to remember what matters.

We come to worship from generation to generation,

to find our place among the ancestors choosing to know more about God's love.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 9 July 2023, Pentecost A 2023, p.76

Let us pause,

hold silence,

find the peace of this place.

Let us draw breath,

centre ourselves and wait.

Let us be here

as we are,

willing grace.

And in such a place

of wonder and hope

worship God.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 9 July 2023, p.54

Sing - Here In This Place / Gather Us In (TIS 474)

We sing a song that gathers us and invites us to be open to the new light, new life that transforms us...

Here in this place new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away,
see, in this space, our fears and our
dreamings,

brought here to you in the light of this day.

Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;

gather us in, the blind and the lame;

call to us now, and we shall awaken,

we shall arise at the sound of our name.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven light years away,
but here in this space, the new light is
shining,

now is the kingdom, now is the day.

Gather us in, and hold us forever;

gather us in, and make us your own;

gather us in, all peoples together,

fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery;

we are the old, who yearn for your face;

we have been sung throughout all of
history,

called to be light to the whole human race.

Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,

gather us in, the proud and the strong;

give us a heart so meek and so lowly,

give us the courage to enter the song.

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Prayer - Praise and Confession

Living, loving God,

we come before you

with gratitude in our hearts and praise on our lips,

offering you our worship and our whole selves.

God of grace and mercy,
we take time to be still in this place,
we reflect on the times
when we have not relied on your word or wisdom,
when we have not shown any concern or compassion when we should have done so;
when we have not loved our neighbour as we love ourselves;
when we have remained silent when we should have spoken up
and spoken when we should have kept silent.

O God, we are weary.
We are weary with words.
We are weary with worry.
We are weary for this world.
We pray for your rest and peace for all our weariness.
pause

O God, we carry heavy burdens.
We are burdened by injustice.
We are burdened by inequality.
We are burdened by choice.
We struggle with so many choices –
choices about the beginnings or endings of commitments,
choices that take us beyond what we know,
choices that are so abundant and filled with possibility and wonder,
choices about how to carry the heavy burden of sharing in your story with love and grace.

Silence

God, as we dwell in your presence and hear you through the word of Scripture, we ask
that you open our eyes to see and know that you are here among us;
and that you open our souls to recognise your voice.
These things we pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

*Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 47, Resources for 9 July 2023, p.54 and
Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 9 July 2023, p.78*

Sing - Highways and Byways (Seasons 6-18)

*A song that invites us to think about how we are ready to serve and offer ourselves in
painting a picture of God's reign in the world.*

*Go into the highways and byways,
far beyond the safe and secure.
Gather in the lost and the lonely,
listen to the cries of the poor.
Go up to the skyways and flyways,
paint a rainbow all across the sky.
Living out the love of Christ Jesus,
shining out God's glory in our lives.*

God, make us ready to listen,
ready to worship, ready to pray.
Make us a people of mission,
willing to hear your word and obey.

Help us to welcome the stranger,
reach out to others in need.
Make us a people of holy hospitality.
Go into the highways and byways...

God, make us ready to follow,
ready to go wherever you say.
Guide us through all our tomorrows,
meeting the needs of every day.
Help us encourage each other,
striving for unity,
building a rainbow of different personalities.
Go into the highways and byways...

God, make us ready to lead and
ready to shoulder some of the load.
Give us the courage we need and
faith to explore a different road.

Give us a spirit of service in our
communities.
Teach us to labour in love,
and live responsibly.
Go into the highways and byways...
© 2002, Sandra Sears

Listening for God's Voice

Dreamtime - The Story of the Five Islands

<https://www.coomaditchie.org.au/dreaming-stories>

Introduction to reading...

Today's reading from Genesis picks up the story of Abraham as he is nearing the end of his life. Sarah has died and Abraham realises he needs to find a wife for Isaac. So he sends his servant back to their homeland to find someone from Abraham's own people. This part of Abraham's story is told in Genesis as a narrative but then retold through the voice of Abraham's servant who is sent to find a suitable wife and meets Rebekah at a well. We pick up the story as the servant speaks to Rebekah's father.

Reading: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

³⁴ So he said, 'I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. ³⁶And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. ³⁷My master made me swear, saying, "You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; ³⁸but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son."

⁴² 'I came today to the spring, and said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! ⁴³I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, 'Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,' ⁴⁴and who will say to me, 'Drink, and I will draw for your camels also'—let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son."

⁴⁵ 'Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, "Please let me drink." ⁴⁶She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, "Drink, and I will also water your camels." So I drank, and she also watered the camels. ⁴⁷Then I asked her, "Whose daughter are you?" She said, "The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him." So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸Then I bowed my head and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left.'

⁵⁸And they called Rebekah, and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' She said, 'I will.'

⁵⁹So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

'May you, our sister, become
thousands of myriads;
may your offspring gain possession
of the gates of their foes.'

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

⁶² Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. ⁶³Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. ⁶⁴And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, ⁶⁵and said to the servant, 'Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?' The servant said, 'It is my master.' So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Reading: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Jesus has just been told that John the Baptist has been arrested and put in prison. He is speaking to the crowds:

¹⁶ 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

¹⁷ "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

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

Great God, help us to discern your way of love through the many stories unfolding in our lives. Grace us with compassion and openness and lead us to always find our rest and strength in you. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 9 July 2023, p.74

What are the sacred stories that you tell?

How do we decide what is a sacred story?

For Christians, we believe that the Scriptures contain a particular collection of sacred stories. But we do also draw upon stories of people of faith who have inspired us - people like St Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa - their stories are told in ways that make them sacred.

Our local congregations often also tell stories of people who have been special in their communities - the ones who were here first, or who contributed to the establishment of the buildings, or the ones who served for decades on the mission committee or who ran the

Sunday School. There is a plaque in the Lecture Hall to a Sunday School teacher that tells a sacred story of his contribution.

Families tell sacred stories.

And other faiths hold their sacred stories.

And First Nations peoples tell sacred stories too.

Some of these stories contain great detail - perhaps not necessarily factually or historically accurate in all their detail - but important nevertheless.

This story of Abraham sending his servant to find Rebekah is a little like that - we can't be sure of all its details but there are a couple of little details to note -

- Isaac's wife is sought from Abraham's homeland, from Abraham's own people - not from the land of the Canaanites where he now lived - the so-called "purity" of the Hebrew nation is established and reinforced
- Rebekah is given a choice - unusual for an arranged marriage - but reinforces her willing participation - and points to our choice to engage in the way God intends for us
- Isaac takes Rebekah into his mother's tent - Sarah has died and Isaac's action reinforces Rebekah's place in the lineage of the Hebrew people

Sacred stories teach us something about ourselves, about how we came to be, and/or they teach us something about our world and how it came to be.

Some of the stories are accounts of actual events or people, and some are illustrative or metaphors. And some are both - embellished accounts to explain or emphasise.

And then there is another strand of sacred story - those that teach us or offer us wisdom. Again, sometimes these stories are metaphor, or stories about something familiar that are intended to reveal a deeper truth - next week we will begin to engage with Jesus' parables that are a lot like that.

But our sacred stories also contain some more direct words of Jesus.

Today - we hear his grief and frustration as he responds to news that his cousin, John, has been arrested and imprisoned.

He is almost brutal in his assessment of what is going on - you didn't want to celebrate with me, you didn't want to mourn with me. If I fasted, you think I am weird and if I eat you say I eat too much! Yet wisdom is seen in what I do (Matthew 11:19).

He goes on to remind us that wisdom is not always obvious, and people who think they know it all, often are misguided - because wisdom, understanding, knowledge of God is what matters, and that comes in giving our attention to Jesus (Matthew 11:25-27).

And when we do that, when we focus on Jesus, on who he is and what he did, when we stop trying to do it on our own, or stop trying to carry stuff that is simply not our's to carry, and when we take up the way he shows, we discover release, refreshment, rest.

But what makes a story sacred?

Is it sacred only in its telling?

Of course not! It is sacred in who it calls us to be, in how it invites us to reflect its truth in our own living. It is sacred in how we live it out.

Our sacred stories, then, point us back to this table.

The table around which we tell another story - of Jesus taking a path that would lead to his death and to new life; of a love so deep that it meets us in the depth of our pain, our sorrow, our angst, and leads us into transformation and renewal.

"Come to me, all you who are carrying a heavy load, and I will give you rest."

Share my load with me, discover gentleness and humility, discover that together the burden is easier to bear, discover that in this life there is deep peace, rest for our weary souls.

So what are the sacred stories you tell?

What wisdom are you sharing with the people around you?

Perhaps today as we gather around this table, we will discover again the depth of its truth for us and we will find ourselves encouraged to share our sacred stories not only in their telling but in our living.

Let us pray,

Ancient of Days,

from generation to generation we tell sacred stories.

As we listen and learn, may your stories shape us always into being more like the people you have created and called us to be. And may we find the courage to continue to tell your stories in our words and through our lives. Now and always. Amen.

Responding

Sing - I Heard The Voice of Jesus Say (TIS 585)

As we sing, we listen for the voice of Jesus, inviting us to rest, to drink to follow his light...

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
your head upon my breast."

I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad;
I found in him a resting-place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down and drink and live."

I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk
till travelling days are done.

Horatius Bonar

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

God of hospitality,
no one comes close to you
when it comes to offering an open invitation.
You invite all to your house,
to your table, to your arms.

We pray that all the world
would hear and receive this good news.
May we remember that no one ranks higher than anyone else in your kin-dom.
And in remembering this
may we treat each other
the way that you treat people.
Pause

God of generosity,
you treat us all with a tender love,
At this time, we pray for our friends, our families and those who need you more than ever.
Pause

We ask that you pour out your healing on all who need it.
May you be generous with your transforming love
for those who need it in their lives,
bringing about reconciliation in families, and in places of discord.
Pause

God of all gifts,
you bless us with the gifts of the spirit
to play our part in furthering your purpose and to become the Body of Christ in the world.
Help us to be your hands and feet
in order that we may continue the work
that needs to be done.
Pause

God of grace,
we thank you that you are in our lives.
Help us to show people that your Way is open to all.
We ask these things in the name of Jesus
who opened doors for all
and breaks down the barriers that trap us,
setting us free to live life to the full. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 47, Resources for 9 July 2023, p.55

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.

Gracious God,
as we come before you with these,
our offerings of ourselves
and our money,
we dedicate them to the work of your church.
Like the village well,
may these gifts allow this, your church,
be a place where people can safely gather as well as a place
where thirst may be quenched
Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 47, Resources for 9 July 2023, p.54

Sending

Sing - Praise The God Who Changes Places (TIS 178)

We go singing our praise of the one who comes amongst us and invites us to be free...

Praise the God who changes places,
leaves the lofty seat,
welcomes us with warm embraces,
stoops to wash our feet.

Friends be strong!

Hold your heads high!

Freedom is our song! Alleluia!

Praise the Breath of Love, whose freedom
spreads our waking wings,
lifting every blight and burden
till the spirit sings:

Friends be strong!

Hold your heads high!

Freedom is our song! Alleluia!

Praise the rabbi, speaking, doing
all that God intends,
dying, rising, faith renewing,
calling us his friends.

Friends be strong!

Hold your heads high!

Freedom is our song! Alleluia!

Praise, until we join the singing
far beyond our sight,
with the Ending-and-Beginning,
dancing in the light.

Friends be strong!

Hold your heads high!

Freedom is our song! Alleluia!

Words: Brian Wren
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Sending and Blessing

As we go from here,

may we seek to be an answer to the prayers of our world.

May we strive to play our part in

bringing about a fair, just and loving world in our words and actions.

And may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

challenge, comfort and sustain us today, tomorrow and forever more.

Spill The Beans, Issue 47, Resources for 9 July 2023, p.56

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Rev Kath Merrifield

9 July 2023