



Reflection

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.*



Light Candle

As we gather today,
we turn towards the one who is the Light of the World:
Jesus the Christ.
We seek the light.
We celebrate the light.
We allow ourselves to be drawn to the light.

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:

those who have carried the sacred stories from generation to generation

those who carry the sacred stories today

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

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

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.

A Prayer After the Referendum

The prayer is inspired by the language of the revised Preamble, a change to the Uniting Church's own Constitution passed by the 12th Assembly in 2009

God, ancient of days,
we give you thanks
for the ways in which First Nations people
have cared for Country since creation
and for their unbroken Sovereignty over their lands and waters.

We give you thanks
for the ways in which they encountered you
through law, custom and ceremony
and for their particular insights into your ways.

We give you thanks
for the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress,
for the ways it nurtures Indigenous spirituality
and shares holistic ministry with First Nations People.

We pray for all First Nations People today,
acknowledging all they endure as a result of colonisation
and lamenting the racism and vitriol experienced across the Referendum campaign.

We pray for our nation,
that following the Referendum we might seek unity
in reconciliation, justice and truth telling.

We pray for our Church,
that we might grow into our Covenant more fully
and continue walking together as First and Second Peoples.

In the name of Christ, our lodestar.
Amen.

*Rev Sharon Hollis
President, Uniting Church In Australia Assembly*

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Philippians 4:1-9

¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of

God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Reading: Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet." ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ 'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.'

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,

Reflection

This artwork is a great depiction of the wedding banquet Jesus describes in today's reading from Matthew. Jesus welcoming everyone to a table full of food, here we are the invited guests to enjoy the King's banquet.

Earlier I asked who had organised and paid for a wedding and of course there are many of you who have done that. It's a big expense and a huge effort to plan and organise a wonderful wedding day for those who are loved by family and friends. Luke 14 also describes this great banquet scene but Matthew ramps it up a notch by saying it was a King who was preparing a wedding feast for his son.

How could any of us ignore a request from the King to attend his son's wedding? How many of us sat glued to the tv to watch the wedding of Prince Harry and Megan Markle, Will and Kate, or Mary and Frederik before that? Weddings are special. And when this story was being told, weddings were weeks-long affairs – full of music, food, wine, accommodation, even wedding clothes to wear.

When we were married the invitations were sent out to the guests about 6 weeks before the day. Now, save the date requests announce the day sometimes 12 months in advance, then an invitation with instructions about the venue and a gift register which arrives much closer to the actual date. What remains the same is that you still must reply to the invitation.

When this King wanted his guests to know of the banquet, there were no written invitations or perhaps even no final date, just a personal invitation announcing that preparations were underway for his son's wedding, and to be ready for the final announcement when all was prepared.

But those guests refused to come. And for a second time, the king sent out his workers to let his guests know to come but they were busy, they had excuses. For a third time the King sent his workers out to find not those he first planned to invite but anyone who would come. And they came.

For me this story speaks of God's invitation to us, to come as we are, even without the means or entitlement to an invitation. How many of us were invited to Prince Harry's wedding?

An open table is just that, a table open to all, to any who respond to God's invitation. And this is an open invitation because, as we know, those who didn't want to come, didn't, those who were too busy, missed out, but those who receive and accept the invitation, come to a table laden with all good things. They come to a table where the least, in status, in self-worth, in age, or size, or skill or least deserving, are met with generous hospitality and graciousness. This wedding invitation is an invitation into joy, it is a joyous event. One we should find ourselves reflecting in ourselves and to others.

Now you may notice that I have ignored that the King's workers were murdered and the King took his revenge on them by killing the murders and burning their towns and cities. Matthew was aiming this gospel at a particular audience. Commentators suggest that the author of Matthew's gospel was again ramping the story up and reflecting on the fate of Jerusalem after 70 CE, well after Jesus told this story. For me the more important part of this story was the invitation to those of us least deserving to be offered one.

This is a great picture and a wonderful promise, but we can't ignore the real elephant in the room...the guest who turned up and was turned out...

Some commentators agree that this parable is really two parables, God's invitation to an open table and what happens when those who accept the invitation but don't ready themselves, aren't prepared.

Would you turn up to a wedding in your pyjamas, or tennis clothes? The parable suggests that as guests to an open table, we still need to prepare by being attentive to God who is present with us, being open to hearing and thinking about what we hear, see and experience within God's love, and being prepared to share what we understand of the love of God with others, and being fully present with God.

The guest who turned up and was turned out was unprepared, even when offered all that was needed. This is a reminder that this invitation to be as present with God as God is with us, is life changing. This has little to do with what we bring and everything to do with what God gives. It isn't about the guest's clothes, it's about the guest's heart, attitude and spirit to God, to God's people and the whole of God's creation.

Do we sometimes spend more time doing things for God than being present with God? I know I do. I know that I get caught up in committees and activities and jobs that need to be done, and for me, the easiest thing to drop out of my day is time spent with God. And I know that sometimes I will be with God and then the next four jobs on the list come into my head and I finish with God, even if God is not finished with me. Sometimes it's hard to break those habits of busyness and just be at the table with God, to enjoy the banquet.

But, then we are reminded of this. Seeing and experiencing God, as Paul reminded the Philippians, in whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is praiseworthy, think about such things... this is where we see God present with us, in and through others, in and through creation, this is where God resides.

Paul says 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice...do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and approach and thanksgiving, offer it all to God and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ.

This is where God resides, in the rejoicing, in the thanksgiving, through prayer and asking – it is about being present with God as God is present with each of us. And receiving that peace, taking time to enjoy the banquet and then to offer each other that same peace through Christ.

This next week is going to be hard for people, hard for those who despair about the referendum results, hard for those with friends, family and colleagues in the Middle East, hard for those who struggle to meet their own daily needs. As we enjoy the banquet, as we enjoy the peace only God can offer through Jesus, so let us offer that to others in the same way. Amen

Responding

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.

Generous God,
we thank you for all that we have been given
and we offer to you our gifts today.
Take all that we offer and use what we bring to share your good news far and wide.
Amen.

Sending

Sing - Highways and Byways (Seasons 6-18)

*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...

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Sending and Blessing

Go now and walk wherever God sends you
with whomever God brings into your circle.

Let Jesus walk beside you
and the Spirit guide your path.

Take the love of God with you
and share it with everyone you meet.

And may God - Divine Creator, Divine Word, Divine Presence - bless you on your journey.

Meredith Yabsley
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