

Catching a glimpse of the face of God...

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle, you might like to add a rock.

Our readings this week have something to say about how we see God. Can I encourage you to look out the window or close your eyes and picture the beauty of a sunrise, catch a glimpse of glory and then take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.



Acknowledgement of Country

In a special way right now we acknowledge the Wadi Wadi community of the Dharawal nation and their Elders who have called this place home back into the mists of time. They have loved and cared for this land, the trees, the waters and rivers, and all the living creatures. We honour them this day, we acknowledge their pain and restate our commitment to work together. We pray for them this day.

Call To Worship – Psalm 99

The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble!

He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

The LORD is great in Zion;

he is exalted over all the peoples.

Let them praise your great and awesome name.

Holy is he!

Mighty King, lover of justice,

you have established equity;

you have executed justice

and righteousness in Jacob.

Extol the LORD our God;

worship at his footstool.

Holy is he!

Let's pray

God of Jesus and our God, the very thought of you is mind-blowing!

We cannot define you, but we can adore you in your holiness.

You are the Light of lights, the Beauty of all beauties, the Love surpassing all loves!

You hold our life in the palm of your hands,

you define our nature by speaking your Word,

and you save us from delusion and futility by sharing our existence.

You are the heart and soul of the universe,

who makes the morning stars sing together

and the angels of God shout for joy
Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful is your name!
We are yours forever! Amen! (Bruce Prewer)

Listening for God's Voice

The beautiful hymn Immortal Invisible tries to capture that sense of how indescribable God is – the last few lines remind me of what happens when we step into the house after being out in bright sunlight and suddenly we can't see anything at all!

**“All praise we would render, Oh help us to see,
Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee.”**

<https://youtu.be/4oGuGzCFEWI>

Bible Reading: Exodus 33: 12-23

Moses said to the LORD, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people"; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight." Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.'

The LORD said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The LORD"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' And the LORD continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'

Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Reflection

Back in the Exodus reading God explained to Moses that it just wasn't possible for a human being to see the face of God. Here in the gospel reading we have Jesus in another encounter with the Jewish leaders. Again, they are trying to trap Him, trick Him into saying something they can use against Him.

We understand all too well a world where money is more important than people, where it seems all decisions are based on material wealth and power. The Pharisees and Herodians had huge differences in the way they saw things, isn't it interesting that they can so easily put aside their differences when there's an opportunity to catch this country rabbi and His ragamuffin band of followers. Trying to work out how to avoid paying tax has been around as long as there have been taxes and so they ask Jesus, should we pay taxes to the emperor or not?

Jesus doesn't hesitate. Bring me a coin, whose head is on the coin? Obviously Caesar's. Well if the coin has Caesar's image on it then that's who it belongs to. Do we notice the unsaid part of this conversation? Look in the mirror, you who are made in the image of God; whose image do you see? What does that say about who you belong to? When you are worried or concerned about something and you wonder who is in your corner or on your side, remember who you belong to. Even though you may feel alone, you're not, because the One whose image you bear has never taken His eye from you.

But let's go a little further. God told Moses it wasn't possible for us to see God's face and yet there is this hunger in us to want to know God, to know what He/She looks like. If our relationship with our Creator is going to be as close as it was meant to be then somehow this longing to see the face of God needs to be addressed, but how? The only way is for God to take that step; that huge, cataclysmic leap and become the God man Jesus. Take another look at this picture – the Pharisees holding up the coin with the profile of Caesar on it and standing in front of them is the profile of God.

If you want to know what God would do, look at what Jesus did. If you want to know who God cares about, look at who Jesus cares about. Even they recognised that Jesus behaved in a very different way to them *“you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality”* that's a good manifesto for our behaviour.

The other reading for this week comes from 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 where Paul writing to the Christians in Thessalonica tells them that their actions show the love of Jesus so well that everyone can see it and they then pass on that news when they talk about them. What about us? You and I? Do our actions, our words, the things we commit to, the causes we champion show the image of the One who created us? The One we belong to? May it be so.

Responding

You might like to watch this video from Hillsong, All the Heavens, that talks about how we might respond as our understanding of God grows.

<https://youtu.be/jEqB-z5nSKc>

Offering

How would you like to respond to God's word today? Has something stirred in your heart? Is there something you are thankful for and you want to somehow express that? How will you do that today, tomorrow, next week?

Loving God, Jehovah Jireh, the one who provides everything we need and more, we come, your grateful people wanting to somehow express our thankfulness. Would you take

the gifts we bring, would you take our plans and intentions, our thinking and our praying and use everything as a way of sharing your love. Amen.

Praying for our World

Helen has prepared our prayers this week

I wish to begin these prayers a prayer written by an aboriginal pastor, Ray Minniecon of Redfern. He was the celebrant who married one of my daughters in 1997. It echoes my heartache at the Referendum decision.

God of our Dreaming. Father of all our Aboriginal nations in Australia. You have lived among us since time immemorial. We have always known You. You gave this land to our Aboriginal nations. You have not dispossessed us nor destroyed us.

People from other lands, who do not understand our unique culture, our unique lifestyle and our unique heritage have come and destroyed much of our way of life. Many of these people from other lands now want to understand and reconcile with us.

*But for many of us Aboriginal people, we find this reconciliation business a little difficult.
Too many of our children are still in jails.
Too many of our children are still living in sub-standard housing.
Too many of our mothers are living on the streets or in refuges.
Too many of our children are still uneducated.
Too many of our children have no land and no community to go back to.
Too many of our children have not got good opportunities for good employment.
Too many of our children are living in extremely unhealthy environments.
Too many of our children are living among violence and abuse.
Too many of our children are dying to drugs and other soul-destroying substances.*

God of our Dreaming and Creator of our people, we sometimes feel overwhelmed by these things. Many of us feel like we are refugees in our own land.

Today we are coming together again on one of our battlegrounds to cry out to You for mercy and justice for our children, for our families and for our land.

We pray that more resources will be given to our local community organisations to help us grow healthy and strong.

We pray that the peoples from other lands will be given a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone so that they can understand us and support us properly.

We pray that your Spirit will help and encourage us to grow good strong Aboriginal leaders.

Father we want to grow strong and healthy again in our own land. We want to take our rightful place in our land and make our contribution to the re-building of our families, our communities and our nation.

Please hear our cries for justice. We ask these mercies in the name of Your Son. Amen

Ever loving and forgiving God,

There are so many heartaches in our world today. We pray for the disasters in Israel and the Gaza strip; for the war in Ukraine; for the war in Yemen; for the people destroyed by earthquakes in Afghanistan and Morocco; by floods and landslides in Libya, China, India; and we feel so helpless. Give us the strength to be generous – both financially and with our time - to support the agencies who are working in these areas of our world.

As we look at our church community there so many needs right here where our thoughtfulness and love can make such a difference. We pray for the frail, the injured, those suffering with cancer and the treatments available.

There is a lot of financial anxiety in working class people as costs go up. Help us to support others wherever possible. We are all unique – and won't all see things the same way. Help us to be patient with others and able to respond to differing views with respect but with honesty.

And lastly, I thank you for this beautiful land and the flowering of the jacarandas, Illawarra flames and silky oaks which herald Spring. We thank you for the safety we live in and our beautiful climate. In Jesus' name, Amen

Sending

You might like to listen to Alan Jackson singing "Turn your eyes upon Jesus".
<https://youtu.be/KNu7AeExvgs?si=4WuH4R8UDHoLohBi>

As we go out into this week, may we go with our eyes open, expecting to encounter God in unexpected places and ways, looking for those moments of glory where we see our God more clearly, spending time with Jesus; God's face made plain for us to know, and alert to feel the breath of the Holy Spirit stirring in us and in those around us. Amen.

Marion Haigh
22.10.23