



Ready!

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 - Father Let Your Kingdom Come
(Porter's Gate)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHIGm7qYVz4>



Light Candle

We light this candle...

Light the candle

And we breathe...

and 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

In this place,

where the land meets the sea,

where the sea makes a noise,

since time beyond our imagination,

the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have cared for the land and the sea and its creatures great and small.

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.

And we pray for our future together -

there is work to be done -

to build relationships that honour and respect those for whom this land is embedded in their being.

We commit ourselves to the way of love.

Call to Worship - based on Psalm 78:1-7

Give ear, O people, to God's teachings.

For in parable and story God's wisdom is revealed.

Come, let us remember the stories of our ancestors in faith.

Let us share them with our children, and celebrate the goodness that has come from them.

God has established decrees with our grandparents and all generations:

and God has asked us to teach and continue them.

Come, people of God, let us raise our hope in God, and remember our blessings;

let us never forget God's glorious works in our lives.

Come, let us worship the God of Life!

Opening prayer

Liberating God,

each day presents us with many choices.

Today we have chosen to worship together in thanksgiving and praise.

We have found the freedom and joy of being able to gather in this place in peace;

we have found the time and resources to be able to enjoy this precious opportunity;

and we have followed the calling of our faith to come together to seek you, to pray for ourselves and the world around us, and to give thanks.

Be with us as we worship,

and help us to choose you over and over.

Help us to recommit ourselves to the blessings and challenges of our devotion to you and your love.

Be made known to us, and help us to feel you near, we pray. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 2A, Resources for 12 November 2023, pp138-9

Sing - All Are Welcome (vv1-4)

Let's sing of the kind of community we are seeking to build and be a part of here...

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end
divisions:

*All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

All are welcome...

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that
frees us:

All are welcome...

Let us build a house where prophets
speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

Let us build a house where hands will
reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and
teach,
and love the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;

let us bring an end to fear and danger:
All are welcome...

© 1998 Marty Haugen from *Common Ground – a Songbook for all the Churches*,
Saint Andrew's Press, Edinburgh

Prayer

God of all creation,
we praise you for the beauty of this place in which we live -
for crashing waves and the stillness of rivers and lakes;
for rolling thunder and a gentle spring breeze;
for noisy birdsong and the quiet murmur of livestock in the fields;
for the bursts of colour in our garden beds and the tiny buds of growth as new leaves
emerge.

Gathering God,
we are grateful for this community with whom we meet this morning -
the young and the older,
the wise and the learning,
with varying degrees of mobility and strength,
with all our joys and struggles.
You draw us together, and invite us to reflect your reign of love in the world.

Abiding God,
there have been times when we have chosen the gods of our contexts,
over full devotion to you.
We have worshipped at the altars of progress, efficiency, competition, and acquisition.
We have claimed to be your people while behaving in ways that simply do not bear this
out.
We have allowed the obsessions of the "world" and the scarcity mentality of our cultures to
permeate our spirits and cause us to wander.

We imagine we are ready to be in your presence,
but in truth are often asleep to the true preparedness of constant vigilance in your grace.
Forgive our shallow ways,
and wake us up to what it means to be ready to follow whole-heartedly.
Jostle us into alert commitment.
Teach us to embrace the responsibilities that come with helping to bring about your realm
on Earth.
And help us to stay awake and prepared, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance

The great good news is that though we may sleep and fall short, God is always awake to
our needs, and provides over-flowingly. Though we may wander into the wildernesses of
many temptations, God's journey is one of focused and complete compassion.
We are loved and forgiven.
God will always embrace us, whether we are ready for such grace or not.
In this, let us be assured.

And we give thanks to God!

Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 36 , Resources for Pentecost 23, 8 November 2020, p139

Sing - Borning Cry

This song is written as if God is speaking, naming God's presence in all the stages of our lives...

I was there to hear your borning cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptised to see
your life unfold.
I was there when you were but a child
with a faith to suit you well;
in a blaze of light you wandered off to find
where demons dwell.

When you heard the wonder of the Word
I was there to cheer you on.
You were raised to praise the living Lord to
whom you now belong.
If you find someone to share your time,
and you join your hearts as one,

I'll be there to make your verses rhyme
from dusk til rising sun.

In the middle ages of your life,
not to old, no longer young,
I'll be there to guide you through the night,
complete what I've begun.
When the evening gently closes in
and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been with just
one more surprise.

I was there to hear your borning cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptised to see
your life unfold.

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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." ⁷Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." ⁹But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other young women came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." ¹²But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

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

Let's pray...

God, in a world that sometimes seems to have gone mad, we yearn for the breaking in of your realm among us.

As we reflect on the Scriptures, reveal your realm to us, we pray, and help us to see how we fit in it all. Amen.

We had friends around for a meal last night. We all agreed that we wanted to “keep it simple” so we settled on a BBQ and some salads. A good plan!

However, I have known for some time that the gas in our bottle is running short, but time, energy, forethought, for whatever reason, I hadn't got around to filling it or replacing it (as we do these days). And I may not have said anything to Narelle about my concern for the gas levels. And I hoped and prayed there would be enough to cook the steaks.

[As I write, I am still hoping and praying - but the outcome is not important!]

“The kingdom of heaven will be like this” (Matthew 25:1)¹.

Jesus tells a parable - the Greek *παραβολή* - which literally means *παρα* = parallel or next to and *βολή* = to throw or cast down. So we have “to throw down next to”.

A parable is an invitation to play with the images offered to discover what they might teach us, in this case, about God's kingdom.

And I wonder, whether because of the nature of this particular parable, or of where it is located in this particular gospel, we leap too readily to thinking that this must be about a kingdom that will come sometime in the future. I wonder too whether we draw a bit too readily on other parts of the Scriptures (like Paul's letter to the Thessalonians) to give meaning to this parable. But I am not sure that is what is intended...

This parable Jesus tells, appears in the gospel we know as Matthew, in a collection of Jesus' teaching and parables (Matthew 23-25) placed in Jerusalem right before the last Passover meal. It is a collection that focuses on what some have described as “the end times” and it raises themes of judgement with a few references to “weeping and gnashing of teeth” thrown in (24:51 and 25:30) - sometimes puzzling, sometimes frightening, certainly needing us to do a bit of work in order to wrestle with these passages.

And it is not my intention today to tell you what it all means - that is not the point...

Both the gospel attributed to Matthew and Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica were written about 40-50 years after Jesus' ministry in Israel. Paul's letter, in particular, is one of the earliest pieces of Christian writing we have.

We need to understand that the early Christians believed that Jesus would return *in their lifetime*, or at least that they wouldn't die before Jesus returned, and so when this clearly hadn't happened, and they and their brothers and sisters were now getting old and dying, they began to struggle with what that meant for them. In Paul's community, the very real pastoral concern is that those who had died would miss out on the resurrection, on the idea of God drawing God's people to God's self in new life. So what were they to do?

¹ Many of these ideas and thoughts are drawn from Rev Dr John Squires at <https://johnsquires.com/2023/11/08/oil-and-light-and-being-prepared-matt-25-pentecost-24a/>

Let's look first at the parable.

Jesus sets it up for us to see immediately that this story is not going to go well for half the group - he describes five of the young women as "wise" and five as "foolish" (25:2). And while historically we don't actually know a lot about how weddings were celebrated in Israel or indeed in the Roman Empire (we know more about how the bride's hairdo than we know about the actual customs), Plutarch tells us that 5 torches are enough for a wedding - so already there is trouble for half of them.²

The bridegroom, then, is delayed so much so that it is now the middle of the night - remember, the thief comes in the night, the bridegroom comes in the night - there is a fear of the night/dark - God renews the world as the dawn breaks, and the light returns. All of this has echoes in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. And yet, here the Greek word used for wisdom is not σοφία (*sophia*), it is φρόνιμοι (*phronimoi*) which is more like 'shrewd' or 'prudent'.

The parable serves as a warning to be ready for the arrival of the bridegroom. "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (25:13). It celebrates wisdom in the teenage girls who came with extra oil, who came prepared and even though the wait was longer than expected, and they all had become drowsy, they were able to spring into action at a moment's notice.

But it is also troubling, in that if we equate the coming of the bridegroom with the coming of Jesus, then we are confronted with him closing the door and excluding the foolish ones. I don't know about you but in my less wise moments, my "can't be bothered to fill the gas bottle because I am sure it can last one more time" moments, this parable makes me just a little unsettled.

For a start, the wise ones don't share!

Next there is a dualism here that needs to be held lightly: the wise and the foolish; and elsewhere in this collection of teaching: the trustworthy and the worthless (25:14-30), the sheep and the goats (25:32).

And yet, in this parable, all of the young women fall asleep, but only the ones with extra oil are allowed to in to the banquet. In Matthew's account, in but a few days, the disciples also fall asleep, but that is not the end of their story (Matthew 26:40-46).

And then there is Paul.

Paul has this idea of the dead being raised and those still living being caught up in the clouds, meeting Jesus in the air (1 Thess 4:16-17).

Matthew's Jesus also speaks earlier of "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30, drawing on Daniel 7).

And perhaps this is entirely reflective of Jesus' own understanding of his ministry and the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies.

The parable of the young women, then, might also reflect Jesus' understanding of the ancient prophets and an expectation that God would bring God's creation to fulfilment in the current age, in their lifetime.

Paul writes to offer words of comfort.

And I need to point out that these verses have been used to develop a whole theory of rapture, which was popularised in the 19th century by John Nelson Darby who was a

² By The Well podcast, Episode 49, A251 Pentecost 24, Kylie Crabbe and Robyn Whitaker, <https://bythewell.com.au/episodes/a251-pentecost-24>

Plymouth Brethren. It has since grown into a whole industry - some of you may have been drawn in by the "Left behind" series. If you haven't read them, don't bother; and if you have, please don't think they are anything else than fiction with very dubious theological and biblical underpinning.

The letter to the Thessalonians is the earliest of Paul's letters, and is the most ancient part of the New testament. This is a pastoral letter.

Paul doesn't want us to be uninformed, or a better translation might be 'ignorant'.

What is important to understand here is that the language of "going to meet Christ in the air" is language that draws on the ancient practices of triumphant processions where - when important people came to the city - a general, the emperor or another king - then the people went out of the city gates to meet them and then to escort them back into the city.

And can you hear echoes of the young women going out to meet the bridegroom?

This is not about being beamed up to heaven like some Star Trek fantasy, but about going out to meet Christ to escort him as he comes amongst us. It is not about an escape from earth but a re-creation of the creation as God intended it.

Perhaps then, the young women who miss out, miss out because instead of joining the welcome party, they choose to go get oil (echoes of another wedding banquet Jesus speaks about in Matthew 22) - we've got something else more important to do.

The point of Paul's encouragement is that we will be with God forever, and so will the people we love (4:17).

Perhaps then we can ask, was anyone in Jesus' parable truly wise - even the ones who seem prepared, who seemed to have their life together, fell asleep. So is anyone truly wise, is anyone truly ready for the arrival of God's realm?

Or perhaps the question for us today is what does it mean for us to be ready to meet Christ and to celebrate and participate in his being in our midst?

The parable is both urgent and expectant, demanding the readiness of Jesus' disciples to respond and to engage fully.

So how then will we live in readiness and expectation?

Many of us, when we pray and when we are stuck for words, will pray what we call the Lord's prayer, part of which is a desire that "your kingdom come, your will be done".

Are we truly ready for that?

Are we ready to participate in whatever that realm may look like?

Here at the table, we catch a glimpse of God's realm - the idea that all are welcome, that there is enough for everyone, that God enfolds us and our loved ones in extravagant grace and love - always and forever.

May we take this glimpse, this momentary experience, and let it ready us as we meet Christ coming amongst us.

Responding

Prayer for Others (Maurice Barton)

God of all being and God of coming,
we recognise you at work in the here and now,
and at work to bring about the future.

We know you look to us
to strive and yearn towards the coming days,

that we can be part of a world
that seeks to heal and not stoke division,
that seeks to build bridges of care and support,
that seeks to lift up the poor and disadvantaged,
that seeks to bring about your kingdom
one action, one word at a time.

God of love and God of expectation,
we pray for all people
who feel lost and abandoned,
who feel they have no value,
who feel the pressures of financial loss, job loss, and a loss of purpose.

We pray too for people we know and love who are unwell,
recovering from surgery, or just finding life to be a struggle at the moment.
May they know your love and experience your support
through communities that care and reach out to help.

Be with us all, Lord God,
that we might be your eyes and ears,
your hands and feet,
your heart and soul,
wherever we find need.

Adapted from *Spill The Beans*, Issue 36 , Resources for Pentecost 21, 25 October 2020, p.105

Sing - Table of Plenty (AOV2-20 - vv1-3)

Chorus:

Come to the feast of heaven and earth!

Come to the table of plenty!

*God will provide for all that we need,
here at the table of plenty*

O, come and sit at my table
where saints and sinners are friends.
I wait to welcome the lost and lonely
to share the cup of my love. *Chorus*

O, come and eat without money;
come to drink without price.
My feast of gladness will feed your spirit
with faith and fullness of life. *Chorus*

My bread will ever sustain you
through days of sorrow and woe.
My wine will flow like a sea of gladness
to flood the depths of your soul. *Chorus*

Dan Schutte

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.

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.

God of all Life and Love,
you invite us into service of your vision,
of a world made new,
of communities living in peace,
of people striving to do better and be better,
and we offer ourselves into that service.
Use who we are and what we have
as a living witness to you,
may we remain responsive and ready to bear witness to your gracious love. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 36 , Resources for Pentecost 21, 25 October 2020, p.105

Sending

Sing - Nothing Is Lost on the Breath Of God

As we go, we sing a song that reminds us that God holds all that we are, all that we experience, all that we offer...

Nothing is lost on the breath of
God,
nothing is lost for ever;
God's breath is love, and that love
will remain,
holding the world for ever.
No feather too light, no hair too
fine,
no flower too brief in its glory;
no drop in the ocean, no dust in
the air,
but is counted and told in God's
story.

Nothing is lost to the eyes of God,
nothing is lost for ever;
God sees with love and that love
will remain,
holding the world for ever.
No journey too far, no distance too

great,
no valley of darkness too blinding;
no creature too humble, no child
too small
for God to be seeking, and finding.

Nothing is lost to the heart of God,
nothing is lost for ever;
God's heart is love, and that love
will remain,
holding the world for ever.
No impulse of love, no office of
care,
no moment of life in its fulness;
no beginning too late, no ending
too soon,
but is gathered and known in
God's goodness.

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Sending

Go now.
Seek and worship God.
Light and shine God's love in the world.
Be God's agents of peace and reconciliation.
Prepare yourselves and remember your commitments.
Allow God to work in you and give thanks for God's grace.

Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 2A, Resources for 12 November 2023, p.140

Blessing

And may the Love of the Creator embrace you;
May the love of Jesus the Christ inspire you;
And may the love of the Holy Spirit energise and enable you
today and always. Amen.

Liturgy adapted from material from:

Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 2A, Resources for 12 November 2023

Spill The Beans, Issue 36 , Resources for Pentecost 23, 8 November 2020

Rev Kath Merrifield

12 November 2023