



## Is This Way Wise?

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### Gathering

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*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 **purple** cloth or scarf as we journey towards Easter in a time of preparation called Lent.*

*Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

### 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.

We wonder at what the light reveals to us.

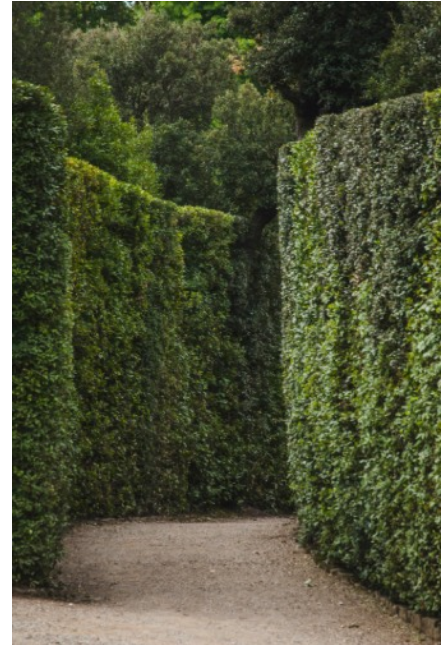


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Juli Kosolapova on  
Unsplash

### Acknowledgement of Country

As we gather to worship, we acknowledge the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation.  
We offer our respect to their elders, past and present.

We honour their care of this Country.

We acknowledge their unceded sovereignty.

Our preparation for Easter is a time of walking with Jesus towards Jerusalem, a walk motivated by love, a walk seeking justice.

We commit ourselves to follow this way of love and justice.

We commit to seeking a more just settlement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### Introduction

Today we turn our minds to thinking about wisdom.

We hear another aspect of God's covenant with God's people - we know them as the 10 Commandments, but perhaps better thought of as God's expectations about how we relate to God and to each other. We'll also hear the story of Jesus turning over the tables of the money lenders in the temple - demanding that we pay attention to how our systems and assumptions embed themselves in daily practice and need to be held up to the light of God's justice.

**Call to Worship** (based on Psalm 19)

The heavens are telling of the glory of God;

**we come together to proclaim it.**

In the wilderness, in the desert we cry out;

**our voice goes out through all the earth.**

God's law is perfect

**our souls are revived.**

God's law is true and righteous,

we desire God's way more than gold,

**God's way is sweeter than honey.**

God redeems us,

liberates us,

and brings us into a new life;

**for we are God's own beloved.**

Adapted from, *Spill The Beans*, Issue 38, Lent-Easter 2021

**Opening prayer**

Let us pray...

As we gather today,

as we come together from all sorts of places and experiences,

as we hold the realities of our days this week - some good and some deeply challenging,  
Holy Friend, make your presence known amongst us.

Reveal your wisdom, and inspire our living,

in Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

**Sing** - Let All Creation Dance (TIS 187)

*Two of our songs today come from the pen of Brian Wren, a contemporary hymn-writer from the UK. Many of his hymns are set to familiar hymn tunes. This one captures the dance, the song of the creation and invites us to join in.*

Let all creation dance  
in energies sublime,  
as order turns with chance,  
unfolding space and time,  
for nature's art  
in glory grows,  
and newly shows God's mind and heart.

Our own amazing earth,  
with sunlight, cloud and storms  
and life's abundant growth  
in lovely shapes and forms,  
is made for praise,  
a fragile whole,  
and from its soul heaven's music plays.

God's breath each force unfurls,  
igniting from a spark  
expanding starry swirls,  
with whirlpools dense and dark.  
Though moon and sun  
seem mindless things,  
each orbit sings: "Your will be done."

Lift heart and soul and voice:  
in Christ all praises meet  
and nature shall rejoice  
as all is made complete.  
In hope be strong,  
all life befriend  
and kindly tend creation's song.

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## Prayer of Praise

Creator God,

everything that you have shaped - the mountains and oceans, valleys and rivers, deserts and creek beds;

each creature into whom you have breathed life - whales and field mice, elephants and frogs, eagles and mosquitoes;

they all proclaim the wonder of your presence in the world.

In the harmony of creation, we see glimpse of the harmony to which you call us,

and we are reminded of our interdependence - on each other, and on each element of this planet that is our home.

Into this earth of breath-taking beauty and fear-inducing awesomeness,

you breath life and hope,

you comfort the weary and the hurting,

you embrace those who yearn for and work for peace,

you reveal your way of love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ,

and your continue to encourage and enliven us through the breath of your Spirit blowing through our lives.

For all that you are, we praise you.

For all that you have created, we praise you.

For all that you have created us to be, we seek your wisdom and guiding. Amen.

## Confession

*The readings from the Hebrew Scriptures in the lead up to Easter reflect different aspects of the covenant God makes with God's people. So far we have reflected on the covenant with Noah and with Abram. Today we read of the covenant God makes with Moses and the people of Israel after their escape from slavery.*

*In the Anglican tradition, these words are read as part of the Communion service with a response. So for our prayer of confession today, let us reflect on the commandments God gives to Moses and to all God's people:*

Then God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup>you shall have no other gods before me.

God, have mercy on us: ***and incline our hearts to keep this law.***

<sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

God, have mercy on us: ***and incline our hearts to keep this law.***

<sup>7</sup> You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

God, have mercy on us: ***and incline our hearts to keep this law.***

<sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>For six days you shall labour and do all your work. <sup>10</sup>But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the

alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

God, have mercy on us: ***and incline our hearts to keep this law.***

<sup>12</sup> Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

God, have mercy on us: ***and incline our hearts to keep this law.***

<sup>13</sup> You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

God, have mercy on us: ***and incline our hearts to keep these laws.***

<sup>17</sup> You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

God, have mercy on us: ***and write your law in our hearts by your Holy Spirit.***

### **Words of Grace**

The wisdom of God often confounds those who think they know it all.  
But for those who seek it, God's wisdom can be discovered in surprising places.  
As we encounter God's wisdom and follow its leading,  
God's Spirit is at work making all things new,  
even us, even here.

***Thanks be to God. Amen.***

### **Sing - The Anointing (Seasons 9-32)**

*So we sing a prayer that we will hear God speaking, that our wisdom will be awakened and our vision enlightened...*

*Lead us to listen,  
to hear the heart speak.  
O God in the quiet voice,  
draw us to you.  
Awaken our wisdom,  
enlighten our vision.  
Anoint us to heal  
and to love as you do.*

*Give us faith that is strong,  
give us hope that is bright.  
May the small voice be our concern,  
may we make burdens light.  
Lead us to listen...*

*May we be slow to judge,  
may we learn to forgive.  
Through compassion and kindness,  
may we let others live.  
Lead us to listen...*

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## Listening for God's Voice

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### Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

<sup>18</sup> For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written,

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

<sup>20</sup>Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

### Reading: John 2:13-22

<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

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 us pray...

*Lead us to listen,*

*to hear the heart speak,*

*O God, in the quiet voice, draw us to you.*

*Awaken our wisdom,*

*enlighten our vision,*

*anoint us to heal and to love as you do. Amen.*

*From The Anointing, Seasons of the Spirit 9-32  
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Is the way of Jesus wise?

Of course not, if we measure wisdom by popular vote or against the way our world usually seems to work!

And, according to Paul, it has probably never been considered wise in the eyes of many people.

The idea of God's chosen one being executed, hung on a cross, is deeply confronting, its shameful, in dying the death of a criminal, he couldn't possibly be God's chosen one - and such a claim is certainly not convincing in terms of pointing us to a preferred way of constructing one's life! Such an idea is both dishonourable and / or just plain silly.

Yet Paul insists that this way, the way of Christ, including his death, is both powerful and wise.

So how do we figure that out?

How do we assess or discern power and, indeed, wisdom?

There are layers - not so much a straight path as a labyrinth - not a maze - a labyrinth has one path that moves towards the centre - sometimes it feels like we are going in the wrong direction, but if we stay the path, we will arrive at the centre.

The 10 Commandments were given to a people who had just been released from slavery. Their spirit has been broken because of the cruelty of the slavery they had endured (Exodus 6:9).

Their life had been highly regulated and constrained for several generations - so there is much they do not know about how to live together peaceably. There is a sense in which there is a need to reset their expectations of one another. No longer is their life just about survival and meeting the demands of their Egyptian overlords. Now it is about forming the kind of community God calls them to be. How will they do that?

How will we do that? How will we form the kind of community God calls us to be?

The commandments, give the people of Israel a framework, a shape, to their relationships - with God, with each other and with their animals.

We can choose to see them as restrictive, focusing on the "You shall not"s or we can embrace them for the formative function they were intended to fulfil - practical reminders and guidance as to what it means to live together in community.

The psalmist in Psalm 19 celebrates God's law, God's framework as being the path to righteousness - the path to a life that lives in relationship with God, with God's people and with all of God's creation.

The imagery, the poet uses, evokes the sweetness of the dripping honeycomb to describe the ways of God, more desirable than the riches of much fine gold (19:10). These laws, these ways of God, says the psalmist, offer great reward (19:11) and there is an honesty about the poet's acknowledgement that we are not so good at identifying our own shortcomings, our own errors, but God's laws keep us from wandering from God's path (19:12). So yes, we can take these commandments as restrictive, but if we are honest about our own human capacity to go our own way and to convince ourselves that our way is better, then these commandments also serve as a way of keeping us on track, pointing us down a path that leads to relationship with God, with one another and with all of creation.

When Jesus enters the temple, he enters as a faithful Jew, a rabbi, a teacher of faith. And what he sees is a system that has lost its way.

The money changers, the people selling animals and birds for the sacrifices, much of it exploitative, and none of it enabling people to live in ways that God intended.

Jesus would have known the words of the prophets, of Isaiah and Micah, that it wasn't sacrifice that God wanted, but rather lives that cared about the poor and the widows, lives that did not bind or oppress others, relationships of integrity and honesty rather than bickering and pointing the finger (Isaiah 58:6-10), lives that lived God's justice and mercy and humility (Micah 6:6-8).

But what he encounters, in the midst of the place of worship, is so far from that.

And he gets angry - he makes a whip and he drives them out (John 2:15-16).

Understandably, the leaders of the temple were a bit agitated - I certainly would be if someone came in here and drove everyone out!

What sign can you give us to justify what you have just done (John 2:18)?

Their question is echoed by Paul in our reading - the Jews want a sign (1 Corinthians 1:22).

Jesus responds a bit opaquely - "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19). And the temple leaders scoffed at the idea - they nor the disciples understood what Jesus is saying.

Several decades later, Paul is able to be more direct - the sign is the death and resurrection of the Christ, and the writer of John's gospel indicates that the disciples figured this out after the events of the first easter (John 2:22).

In the death and resurrection of the Christ, God's chosen one, God's order is restored. We see not only the extravagant grace of God but also we are reminded once more of the way God intends for us to live.

So this wisdom, this way, is not a straight path.

It is not about doing this one thing right and all will be well.

It is a framework, that shapes our relationships - with God, with each other and with the whole of creation.

This wisdom is grounded in love and grace, experienced for ourselves and shared extravagantly.

This wisdom can be a hard road - flying in the face of a world that is focused on making more money and accumulating more stuff, in a world where individual achievement and success is celebrated at the expense of those who lose or suffer, in a world where power and privilege is used to take advantage of those least able to resist.

But this is the way of the Christ, the way of Jesus, as he moves towards the cross.

So some questions to ponder:

Jesus' followers, you and I, as we seek to live reflecting Christ's way in our time and place, are we on that path?

Does this community of faith shape itself around the framework God has provided for us, and do we reflect the extravagant love of Jesus in the world today?

When life gets hard or uncertain or just plain confusing, how do we, how do you, ensure that we are staying on the path of Christ?

Let's pray...

O God,

As we try to shape our lives around the path, the way you show, around the hard road that Jesus shows,

"Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable to you,

O LORD, our rock and our redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

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## Responding

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### **Sing** - When Pain and Terror Strike By Chance (TIS 262)

*This is another song from Brian Wren. Again it is set to a familiar tune, speaking into our uncertainty, reminding us of the story of Jesus and the wisdom of following the path he shows.*

When pain and terror strike by chance,  
with causes unexplained,  
when God seems absent or asleep,  
and evil unrestrained,  
we crave an all-controlling force  
ready to rule and warn,  
but find, far-shadowed by a cross,  
a child in weakness born.

How deep the Wisdom of our God,  
how weak, but truly wise,  
to risk, to sacrifice, to die,  
and from the grave arise,  
to shed the shroud of death and fate,  
freeing our hearts for good.  
We breathe the ample air of hope  
and take our chance with God.

We marvel at God's nakedness  
and sense the play of chance  
in Herod's anger, Peter's growth,  
and Pilate's troubled glance.  
Our Saviour's tempted, tested way  
never was cut and dried,  
but costly, risking life and love,  
betrayed and crucified.

Since Wisdom took its chance on earth,  
to show God's living way,  
we'll trust that fear and force will fail,  
and Wisdom win the day.  
Then come, dear Christ, and hold us fast  
when faith and hope are torn,  
and bring us, in your loving arms,  
to resurrection morn.

*Words: Brian Arthur Wren  
© 1996 Hope Publishing Co*

### **Prayer for Others**

Let us pray for the world that God created and loves.  
*Creator God,*  
*we give thanks that you meet us in the world.*  
*Help us to see you, even in places that shock or surprise.*  
*We pray for the sick and the dying.*  
*We pray for those impacted by war, and for prisoners.*  
*We pray for the lonely and broken-hearted.*  
*We pray for endangered animals and plants.*  
*We pray for all who are marginalised or experience discrimination.*  
*We pray that we would work for justice in your world,*  
*as we follow after Jesus. Amen*

### **Offering**

*This part of our service is not about the money.*  
*It is about considering how we will respond to what we have seen and heard and*  
*experienced this morning, or perhaps throughout the week - how is God prompting you,*  
*nudging you, inspiring you - and what will you do about it?*  
*Each one of us is precious.*  
*Each one of us has something to offer in terms of resources - time, energy, skills, money.*  
*How will you respond?*

Gracious, generous God, we gather in praise,  
seeking nourishment, seeking community, seeking wisdom.



We give thanks for all that you have given to us and  
for all that we receive from each other.  
We offer these tokens of money  
in the hope that they will support the mission and ministry of your church  
in its work for your way here on earth. Amen

Adapted from, *Spill The Beans*, Issue 38, Lent-Easter 2021, p.30

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## Sending

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### **Sing** - In Full Flight (Seasons 6-22)

*"All shall be well," the wise lady whispers...*

We can't quite see what tomorrow will  
offer.

Nothing's that clear, so little in place.  
Yet, "All shall be well," the wise lady  
whispers;  
all shall be well, a goodness to trace.

*Bird in full flight, bird on the wing.  
Soaring above, beyond on the run.  
Journeys of change, vistas of wonder.  
Leading to life through the heart of the  
One.*

Wonders of birth, pained separations.  
Myst'ries too deep, too hard to explain.  
Beauty and hope in each new day  
dawning,

the presence of joy at play once again.

*Bird in full flight...*

Ev'ry day moments alive to love's  
splendour.

Why turn aside for a heaven above?  
God in the laugh, the cry and the gesture,  
grace in the now, peace through the dove.

*Bird in full flight...*

We who are called to live out Love's  
passion.

Those who set out on the journey of faith;  
need look to the skies only to fashion  
the daring of birds, bold courses they take.

*Bird in full flight...*

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### **Sending**

With a framework of love to live by,  
let us go in peace  
to love our neighbour,  
love the stranger  
and to love God.

### **Blessing**

May God the creator bless you,  
May Christ Jesus walk alongside you,  
and the Spirit of love hold you in faith,  
this day and every day. Amen.

*Liturgy adapted from:*

- Rev Dr Bec Lindsay, writing for *Mediacom L3*, Lent 3, 2024
- *Spill The Beans*, Issue 38, Lent-Easter 2021

Rev Kath Merrifield  
3 March 2024