



Lifted Up

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 **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.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, God our Creator, breathed life into this land and its peoples.

The land we gather on,

the land we live, work, play and worship on,

has been cared for since time immemorial by the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal Nation. It has never been ceded.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We commit ourselves to building relationships with those who carry the sacred stories today.

And we commit ourselves to pursuing justice for their communities, so that our reconciled life reflects the way of God here in this place.

Call to Worship - drawing on Psalm 107:1-2

Give thanks to God,

for God is good.

God's steadfast love endures forever.

God gathers us:

from the east and the west

and from the north and the south.

When we cry to God in our trouble,

God holds us in our distress.

Give thanks to God,
for God is good.
So come, let us bring worship and praise.

Opening prayer

We come to this time of worship as we are,
known by God and called by name.
We come with our doubts and our fears
to a God who knows doubt and fear too.
We come, weary and weighed down,
to the Spirit who breathes new life into us
and sends us on our way rejoicing. Amen.

Sing - Gather Us In (TIS 474)

Let's stand and sing as we invite God to gather us, we who come from all walks of life, and all parts of this community, we gather in the light of Christ...

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.

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.

Here we will take of wine and the water,
here we will take the bread of new birth,
here you shall call your sons and your
daughters,
call us anew to be salt of the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
give us to eat the bread that is you;
nourish us well and teach us to fashion
lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

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.

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Prayer of Praise and Confession

Lover of the Cosmos,
we give thanks for your gift of light and love -
for the sunlight as it plays on the water, sparkling and dancing in the waves,
for the moonlight as it stretches its light across the harbour,
for your love shared in a quiet chat with a friend
in a family meal,
as you meet us in the solitude of prayer and reflection.

And so we take a moment now to be still, to be quiet before God in the company of each other.

Generous pause

Take in a deep breath and breathe it out.

Short pause for breath

Notice your body in this place.

Notice your weight on the chair, your feet on the ground, your head bowed.

And listen for the Spirit of Love.

Generous pause

What do you hear?

What do you notice?

What do you feel?

Listen.

Generous pause

Remember the Good News.

Remember that God loves the world so much

that God sent God's Son into the world so that all who believe in him will not die but would have full life.

Take in another deep breath and breathe it out.

Short pause for breath.

Notice your body in this place.

Listen deeply for the Spirit of Love.

Generous pause

Listen to the voice of God calling you:

You are loved.

You are loved.

You are loved.

You are indeed loved.

Go then and live out that certainty - today and in all your days. Amen.

Sing - Everyday Loving (Seasons 5-16)

Our readings today invites us to think about God's love for the world.

This song invites us to think about how we share such extravagant love.

This welcome here is simply free.

It's for the world, for you and me.

We bring our smiles and cares,

our heart's own prayers

and the stories of our days,

to worship God in many ways.

And together we're...

Ev'ryday loving! Ev'ryday loving!

We're just ev'ryday loving!

The way that God loves us!

God's love is deep. God's love is wide.

It's all around, and here inside.

So when we lend a hand or take a

stand,

it's love we're sending round.

In ev'ry day, that's where it's found.

And together we're...

Ev'ryday loving!...

Then can we dare to use our eyes,

and tune our ears to others' cries?

To hear the silent words of those

unheard,

and sing with them their song.

We know that God will lead us on.

And together we're...

Ev'ryday loving!...

O God of Earth, you hear us call.

Shower your love upon us all.
And like a mustard seed, the faith we
need
will blossom as we grow.

Give us your faith, to live and show,
that what you're giving is...
Ev'ryday loving!...

Words and Music: Linnea Good

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' ⁶Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Reading: John 3:14-21

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

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...

God fo Love,

as we reflect on words that are so familiar,

give us new insight, and renewed energy for the incredible truth of your love.

Inspire our words and our living to reflect your extravagant love for all the world. Amen.

When do you get impatient?
What is it that really presses your buttons?

The people of Israel had been in the wilderness for a little while by now, and they were getting a bit sick of quail and manna...
And this is not the first time they have complained about being in the wilderness.
They even suggest that going back to Egypt and to slavery would be better than where they are now.

In our daily living, it is easy to establish a routine that we are comfortable with, and then to find ourselves getting a bit grumpy when that routine gets disrupted.
Maybe we can't get what we need from the supermarket.
Or we get stuck in traffic or can't find a carpark right outside the door.
And complain? Why can't I get what I want - food, the kind of coffee I like, a car park where I want it...?
All this change - why can't it go back to the way it was...?
Not us!

And then we have this curious story.
Poisonous or "fiery" serpents or snakes are sent among the people of Israel.
Get bitten and you die! (21:6)
The people seemingly don't take too long to realise that their complaining probably hadn't been helpful and they ask Moses to do something about the snakes.
And God tells Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole so when someone was bitten, they could "look at it and live" (21:8,9), which Moses does.

A couple of things to think about - God doesn't take away the snakes, just as God is yet to bring them out of the wilderness. They are not removed from the danger - rather, they are given a source of healing and hope.

So fast forward to Jesus.
You might remember that the passage we just heard are part of a conversation Jesus has with Nicodemus.
Nicodemus was a leader in the temple.
He was well-in with the right crowd.
He, along with the other leaders, have been watching and listening to Jesus - and the leaders had decided that Jesus was a threat - to the status quo, to their power, to the way things are...
But Nicodemus wants to hear more - so he comes to Jesus at night - while it is dark, in the hope that he won't be seen.
They have a conversation about what it means to be "born again" or "born from above".
And then we have this section that we just heard:

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Jesus draws attention to the story of the people of Israel and their bronze serpent and compares it to the Son of Man, to himself.
These verse are so familiar. Today, I want to unpack the language a little in the hope it gives you something to chew on as we wrestle with the question of how we share good news in our community today.

So what is it that Jesus is saying here?

First, remember the bronze serpent was not about rescuing people from their present experience, it was about offering healing and hope in their midst.

And let's be really clear, when Jesus in John's gospel uses the term eternal life, he is not talking about something that happens to us after we die, he is not talking about something that rescues us from the lives we live. John, is very clear about this a few chapters further on.... Eternal Life is to know Jesus and to know the one who sent him (John 17:3).

Second - notice that the Greek word translated for us as "world" is "cosmos" - clearly encompassing not just humans but the whole of God's creation - God loves not just humans, but God loves the whole of creation.

Third - the word believe - it is not about agreeing to a set of doctrinal statements, it is not a head commitment to a list of things we think are true. To "believe" in something or someone is to give one's heart to it or to them. When I say, I believe in you - I'm not saying that I understand you to exist, I'm saying that I commit myself to you being all you can be. So to believe in God's Son, is not to agree to a set of rules, but to commit our hearts to the person God's Son is and to shape our lives around that commitment.

And then - what does it mean to be saved?

For many of us, we leap immediately to the idea that we need to be saved from sin - that is, we need to be saved because of all the bad stuff we do.

But that is not the only way to understand who Jesus is and what he is about.

Jesus is a Jew, the stories of the Hebrew people are his stories.

Come back to the serpent on the pole - which is about God offering healing and hope. Hope in the sense of the people being re-formed from the slaves they once were to a people of love and justice.

Healing in the sense of re-shaping them into a healthy community that cared for all their number, including the strangers and the most vulnerable amongst them.

And importantly, there are two other stories that are central to how the Hebrew people understand God's saving grace - the first is in relation to God saving them from slavery in Egypt - so from being slaves or from being oppressed by empire, God sets them free; and the second is that God brings them home to the land they had been promised after they were exiled from that land - so there is something in God's saving grace that is about belonging and returning home.

Jesus also says clearly that God's intention is not to condemn us, not to condemn creation (3:17).

And maybe then we might think about all the ways we condemn ourselves, or we condemn others.

Maybe there are times we have chosen to act in ways that are destructive to ourselves, to the people around us, to the planet, and we need to return to the ways of God.

Or perhaps we have found ourselves enslaved to wealth or power or comfort or privilege and we need to be set free.

Or maybe we have found ourselves a long way from home and we simply need to be shown the way home, to find where we belong again.

At the Communion table, in the midst of our everyday, we remember the Son of Man being lifted up.

We see in him the offer of healing and hope for the world.

We see in him God's promise of freedom, of belonging, and of forgiveness.

Ans so we commit ourselves to the path Jesus shows us.

We choose to walk in the light.

And as we take that path, as we learn more about who Jesus is, and who he calls us to be, as we practice the way of Jesus in our own lives lived in the reality of the world of which we are a part, we grow more deeply in the knowing of God and of God's Son, we discover "eternal life".

May it be so...

Let us pray,

God of Love,

Forgive us when we complain.

As we gaze upon your Son,

as we reflect on his living, his dying and his new life,

open our hearts once more to the wholeness of life you desire for us. Amen.

Responding

Prayer for Others (Val Mason)

God who loves the world,

God who lifted up the snake for healing in the wilderness,

God who lifted up the broken Jesus to new life,

God who comes to meet us in this place,

we pray to you.

We pray for honest conversation.

We pray for eyes to see the flaws in our own lives
and in the systems and structures in which we live.

We pray for healing in the world.

We pray that we might act for the good of all.

We pray that we will not be content until all can live and flourish in fullness of life.

We would be the people who follow after Christ Jesus.

We want to live with the same love Jesus shows.

We want to confront injustice and be agents of transformations as Jesus was.

We want to be honest about our lives.

Through your Spirit, help us, we pray.

Amen.

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

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?

Generous God, we respond to your love with thanks.

Receive what we offer - our money, our time, our skills - as a token of our gratitude and a sign of our commitment to walk the road of love and justice. Amen.

Sending

Sing - We Give Thanks (Seasons 5-44)

And so we go giving thanks...

We give thanks for the goodness of love that is shared.

We give thanks for this table around which we are fed.

We give thanks for this circle of friends and family.

We give thanks, we give thanks, and we give thanks.

We give thanks for this offering of bread and of wine.

We give thanks for these blessings from earth and of vine.

We give thanks for this gathering of symbol, sign and song.

We give thanks, we give thanks, we give thanks.

We give thanks for tomorrow and thanks for today.

We give thanks for the journey and faith along the way.

We give thanks for the promise of Jesus with us now.

We give thanks, we give thanks, and we give thanks.

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Sending and Blessing - drawing on Ephesians 2:1-10

Paul writes to the church in Ephesus:

By grace you have been saved through faith.

As you walk with love and seek justice this week may you know this grace in your body and mind.

Receive the blessing of God's rich mercy and deep love, as you walk in the healing way of Christ accompanied by the Spirit of grace.

Go and do good deeds, which God has prepared for you as your way of life. Amen.

Liturgy adapted from Rev Dr Bec Lindsay, writing for Mediacom L3, Lent 4, 2024.

Rev Kath Merrifield
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