

5th Sunday of Lent ... The hour has come...

Gathering

Acknowledgement of Country

In this place, where the land meets the sea, where the sea makes a noise, since time beyond our imagination, the Wadi Wadi 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. 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.



Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross, candle, perhaps you have been adding stones as a reminder of the road we are taking to Jerusalem.

Our readings this week remind us that God's way is not something out there beyond our grasp or understanding; rather God has promised to write the Law of Love deep in our hearts. You might like to place a hand over your heart, take some deep breaths and feel your heart, beating faithfully without you even thinking about it – just as God faithfully continues to hold and bless and walk with you. Day in and day out whether you notice or acknowledge it, God is faithful.

Lighting the Candle

When we gather to worship, we begin by lighting a candle...

The candle reminds us of Jesus, the Light of the World, the One we come to celebrate and worship today. This light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not, cannot and will not overcome it. (John 1:5)

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

God of boundless mercy and unfailing love,
our creator, saviour and redeemer,
as part of the body of Christ around the world,
as people called to live for You in the families and communities
and networks in which You have placed us,
we gather together to worship You:
to proclaim Your goodness and to offer our thanks and praise.

PAUSE

As we gather we hear the words of David ringing in our ears;

(A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him,

after he had gone in to Bathsheba.)

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

PAUSE

Meet us here, we pray.

Create a new heart in us,
Join our hearts in wholehearted worship.
Breathe Your word into our souls;
engrave Your covenant of grace into our minds and hearts.
Cultivate Your character in us,
inspire and shape us,
unite and encourage us,
that our lives may reflect Your love and justice to the world.
Amen (*Church of Scotland*)

Song: Today we're singing some words written by Rusty Edwards reminding us where our praise belongs – with Jesus, the One who breaks the darkness! We are singing it to the tune often used for Come Thou fount of every blessing, Nettleton.

<https://youtu.be/Rd001HFtZG0>

Praise the one who breaks the darkness
With a liberating light.
Praise the one who frees the prisoners,
Turning blindness into sight.
Praise the one who preached the Gospel,
Healing every dread disease,
Calming storms and feeding thousands
With the very bread of peace.

Praise the one who blessed the children
With a strong yet gentle word.
Praise the one who drove out demons
With a piercing two-edged sword.

Praise the one who brings cool water
To the desert's burning sand.
From this well comes living water,
Quenching thirst in every land.

Praise the one true love incarnate:
Christ who suffered in our place.
Jesus died and rose for many
That we may know God by grace.
Let us sing for joy and gladness,
Seeing what our God has done.
Praise the one redeeming glory,
Praise the One who makes us one.

Listening for God's Voice

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.'

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Reflection

What motivates people to make the choices and decisions they do? Not realizing the consequences of their actions, selfishness, greed, lack of compassion, fear, trying to avoid

something or perhaps concern for others, altruism, a vision for a better future, ultimately love – caring more about someone else than about myself? It's all a matter of the heart, and our readings today are about the heart...and the very real struggles of real people.

We listen to the words of Jeremiah and it's like a bright beacon shining out over the darkest night, there is hope, there is a promise, there is a plan – right now as we look at the trouble and strife in the land that Jesus walked, hope, promise and a plan seem, if anything, further away than ever; and yet these are the words we are challenged with today. Today we try to see some sign, today we continue speaking in faith, trusting that even though we don't yet see it, God is faithful and will fulfill His promises.

Fast forward and we find David knowing how far he has drifted from God – actually, that's a bit of a euphemism – he hadn't drifted! He knew perfectly well that what he was doing was wrong and he kept on going, adding death to dishonor. In Psalm 51 we see him on his knees, admitting the depth of his fault and turning back to God. *Create a new heart, O God, a new spirit, a new beginning.*

Again in the gospel we see real people – the Greeks, who have journeyed to Jerusalem, the city of peace, searching for God. They seek out Jesus and he responds in a way no press agent would recommend. But, when we think about it, that's how Jesus usually responds. No airy-fairy angels and harps floating on a cloud response here.

The demoniac says I want to follow you to the end of the earth – NO. Go back to the people who know you and tell THEM what you have seen. Tell THEM what you have discovered about the love and faithfulness of God.

John's disciples say 'We want to stay with you.' - There is nowhere TO stay, just a road to follow.

The seed has to die before the harvest can come – and something suddenly clicks for Jesus too – the time HAS come, and he knows what that means. Looking around him at those he has traveled with; those he knows and loves; looking down the halls of time to you and to me...

What should I say? It's all too hard? No! The walking together, the loving, that's what it's all about, this is WHY I came. Glorify Your Name, Father. It won't make sense and many people will lose heart but glorify Your Name; be the Faithful One you are; use the pain and the suffering to bring grace beyond anything these, Your precious children can imagine. And Jesus turns His face to Jerusalem.

Natalie Sleeth wrote the beautiful words,

*In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter
there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.*

That's the hope Jeremiah was talking about, that's the forgiven heart David was seeking, that's what kept Jesus with His eyes on Jerusalem – with His eyes on you – all will be revealed when the time is right, God has it in hand.

Responding

Offering

How would you like to respond to God this day; the One who dreamed you into being, sustains and holds you and writes of Love on your heart?

We give Thee but thine own,
What 'er the gift may be
All that we have is Thine, O Lord
A trust O Lord from Thee

Praying for our World

Our prayers for the world today are adapted from a prayer by Vienna Cobb Anderson in *Prayers of Our Hearts* (Crossroad, 1959) and posted on www.BeliefNet.com

God of all blessings,
source of all life,
giver of all grace:

We thank You for the gift of life:
for the breath
that sustains life,
for the food of this earth
that nurtures life,
for the love of family and friends
without which there would be no life.

We thank You for the mystery of creation:
for the beauty
that the eye can see,
for the joy
that the ear may hear,
for the unknown
that we cannot behold filling the universe with wonder,
for the expanse of space
that draws us beyond the definitions of our selves.

We thank You for setting us in communities:
for families
who nurture our becoming,
for friends
who love us by choice,
for companions at work,
who share our burdens and daily tasks,
for strangers
who welcome us into their midst,

for people from other lands
who call us to grow in understanding,
for children
who lighten our moments with delight,
for the unborn,
who offer us hope for the future.

We thank You for this day:
for life
and one more day to love,
for opportunity
and one more day to work for justice and peace,
for neighbours
and one more person to love
and by whom be loved,
for Your grace
and one more experience of Your presence,
for Your promise:
to be with us,
to be our God,
and to give salvation.

For these, and all blessings,
we give You thanks, eternal, loving God,
through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen

The journey continues...

Let's go out with the words of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus ringing in our ears...

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith;
May you be rooted and grounded in love;
May you grasp the full breadth and length
and height and depth of the love of Christ;
May you know that love, which surpasses knowledge;
May you be filled with all the fullness of God.
Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
according to His power that is at work within us,
to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations,
for ever and ever. Amen
Church of Scotland

Marion Haigh
17/3/24