



Creating Community with God

Lighting the candles

John 8:12

요한복음 8:12

约翰福音 8:12

Jesus said to the people, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

후에 예수님은 사람들에게 다시 말씀하셨다. "나는 세상의 빛이다. 나를 따르는 사람은 어두움에 다니지 않고 생명의 빛을 받을 것이다."

耶稣又对众人说：“我是世界的光，凡跟从我的，必不会走在黑暗里，必要得到生命的光。”

Hymn of Praise: TiS 166

Sing a new song

*Sing a new song, sing a new song,
and wait upon the promise of the Lord.
Sing a new song, sing a new song,
and wait upon the promise of the Lord.*

- 1 Creation sings a new song to the Lord,
the universal energies rejoice,
through all the magnitudes of space and time
creatures proclaim the grandeur of Christ. *Chorus*
- 2 The mountains and the valleys and the plains,
the cattle and the wild beasts and the birds,
the shadows and the clouds, the rain and snow,
praise and reflect the bounty of Christ. *Chorus*
- 3 The ocean deeps, the currents and the tides,
the diatoms, the fishes, and the whale,
the storm, the reef, the waterspout, the calm,
praise and reflect the wonder of Christ. *Chorus*
- 4 The fruit trees in their seasons and the vine,
the eucalypt, the cedar, and the palm,
the lotus and the orchid and the rose,
praise and reflect the beauty of Christ. *Chorus*
- 5 The human eye, the shaping hand, the mind
with number and with symbol and design,
in work and play and artistry and prayer,
praise and reflect the wisdom of Christ. *Chorus*
- 6 The love of man and woman clear as dawn,
the will for truth and justice broad as day,
the wisdom of the heart profound as night,
praise and reflect the glory of Christ. *Chorus*

A Prayer of Approach and The Lord's Prayer

Our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God!**

Human and Divine – encountering Jesus Christ

A Time for Everyone – Godly Play story - The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Sacred Story from Scripture Ezekiel 17:22-24

17:22 Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.

17:23 On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind.

17:24 All the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the LORD have spoken; I will accomplish it.

For the stories that connect us to God's love and grace - **Thanks be to God!**

Message *Lessons from the Land*

I'm pretty much a local girl. I was born at Royal North Shore and for more than half my life I have lived within 20 minutes of Eastwood. I'm an ABC – Australian Born half-Chinese woman. I did not grow up Christian, but came to faith when attending a church school and being exposed to the Gospel through the sharing and friendship of fellow students and prayerful teachers.

Not having been embedded in church-centric Christian faith, I understood discipleship to be about following the one who tells us the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand – it is here, within reach – it is what we are meant to be involved with. The Kingdom of God is the focal point for a large proportion of Jesus' parables. Jesus didn't really talk so much about church, other than to tell Peter he would be a cornerstone.

On the other hand, Jesus never seemed to stop talking about the Kingdom.

When I eventually started going to church, I found that church people often conflated the two. The coming of the Kingdom surely implies the growth of the church... but I was left with the question: is church and Kingdom meant to be understood as the same thing?

I have been helped in my thinking as biblical scholars have moved away from the English translation of 'Kingdom' language to Realm of God. I'm not even sure why... perhaps the concept of a 'king' is a reminder of dictatorial control rather than generosity and wellbeing. Yet, the place and time where God reigns should stir us to think of the ideal community we should be working towards.

God's version of community is bigger than the church we know and bigger than what we are likely to plan for.

I remember the first conversations I had about ecotheology, which didn't have a name back then. We were participating in the 'Clean up Australia' Day as school children and in youth groups. Even then, we were talking about the importance of caring for God's creation as faithful stewards. We talked about being caretakers of God's garden.

I had become aware of what was known then as General Revelation. This was the idea that God is revealed in nature.

The heavens are telling the glory of God
and their expanse declared the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1)

TiS 746 [all sing]

The heavens shall declare the glory of God's name
All creation bow at the coming of the King
Every eye shall see – every heart will know
Every knee shall bow – every tongue confess
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord
See the coming of the King
Holy is the Lord

If God is revealed in the heavens and in the stories of nature, I had to stop thinking faith was only about personal sin and personal salvation. God IS revealed in the baby and the old woman and in lovers and in acts of justice and mercy, but God AND GOD'S PURPOSES are also revealed in the oceans and the sunrise and the ways seed scatters and grows. As a seeker of faith and a disciple of Jesus, I had to become more aware of God's creation in order to appreciate what sacred truths are being revealed.

In my early years, I experienced evangelism and introduction to Christian faith as follows:

- General revelation presents us with the challenge to know God
- Personal salvation is the goal of evangelism

As the more recent discipline of ecotheology has opened up, we are starting to see both the glory of God in creation and the consequences of sin in the destruction and abuse of creation. By the 1990's theologians and missional leaders talked of a core aspect of mission being to TREASURE God's creation. Note – this is more than simply enjoying the garden and keeping it nice.

In 2003 I became involved in Christian education in rural and remote areas. I started to learn about the bush and about how farmers and pastoralists understood the land. Staying on properties, and traveling 65000 kms a year, meant my worldview was changing. I no longer saw houses in the same way – I could see the dirt on which they were built, with the desire to assess, would this be a good place for growing food?

Teaching Bible stories across rural and regional areas, I became a learner. Farmers heard the stories of Jesus and explained so many details I missed in my city-centered readings.

Listen to Mark 4:28

The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head,
then the full grain in the head.

I had never paid much attention to how a grain grew before, but I remember this verse. I remember the tears rolling down the face of a proud farmer. It was around the ninth year of drought and there had been some rain... just enough that the stalks of wheat and barley grew. There was tall growth and the heads formed up, but when the time was approaching to harvest, the farmer pulled a sample stalk. He pressed the head to feel the grain and it simply disintegrated with no substance to hold it together. Inside the head, there was no grain – there had not been enough water to form the grains properly. His entire field of tall stalks of good-looking wheat was nothing more than dry stalks, not even worth harvesting.

The earth does indeed produce of itself. And – if the earth is too dry or undernourished or depleted, the product will be depleted, barren husks. The farmers are not to blame for lack of rain or bad luck. They did not plan for drought or floods or locusts or mice. Their job is to scatter the seeds and then give it time. A good farmer will pay attention to the quality of the soil and its preparation to give the seeds the best chance to grow.

When we read a parable like this, urban thinkers are quick to jump to the metaphorical. We imagine the seed to be like us. Are we nourished in faith and growing full and rich, preparing to flourish and be part of the harvest. Are we part of a system of discipleship, growing communities of faith who will seed the next generation of believers? Are we well nourished? If we think of the

Kingdom of God / the Kingdom of Heaven as the People who follow Jesus then this is certainly a valid interpretation, but should we stop there?

Treasuring involves deep appreciation and attention, devotion and delight. Treasuring God's creation brings us into an awe and wonder that places God at the centre of all life. Suddenly, salvation is no longer just about me nor is it just about you nor is it just about us. Christianity is no longer anthropocentric - centred on Human salvation. Rather, Jesus is the centre of ALL creation and ALL reconciliation... Human and all other beings, Heaven and Earth, and all the other things beyond our knowing and understanding.

I don't think this is about either human – or creation / Black and white thinking, or Dualism, has long been the enemy of deeper integrated thinking. Rather, humanity is part of the creation that needs reconciling. The centre of the story is God and God's purposes. Our place is relative to God, rather than God existing to satisfy our needs.

When the farmer hears the parable, and goes into her field, and breaks off a stalk, and examines the head to see if the grain inside is but a husk or is full of rich life, the farmer notes that the parable is operating on multiple levels: both the metaphorical and the present, literal, physical, descriptive functions. God gives and enables life to my soul, to my spirit, to you, to us AND God gives and enables life to every seed that grows. God gives the energy and power to every star that lights up the sky. God's breath is the breath that causes birds to sing.

And the farmer will tell us – the mustard seed does not need to be sown by us, for mustard, once present will self-sow, spreading and and spreading beyond our control. Farmers know it as a noxious weed, whatever they try to do to get rid of it, it will take hold. It is unstoppable, much like the spread of the Gospel and the faith. Whenever I have seen the Mustard Seed parable told among farmers, they all laugh. It is a farmer dad joke. I have heard a farmer preach this passage, saying only one thing:

Don't waste your time trying to control the Gospel.

Nothing can contain the love of God.

Nothing can stop the spread of God's love.

In July 2009, the Uniting Church adopted a preamble to our constitution. It noted:
When colonizers arrived in Australia...

1. they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.
2. Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.
3. The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.

With the terrible bushfires of late-2019 and early last year, we saw destruction and devastation in our homeland. Before the isolation of COVID, we isolated ourselves inside and at home to avoid the choking heavy smoke-filled air of weeks of fires. Documentaries and enquiries and research reports told us of places that were saved because people had conducted the ancient aboriginal practice of 'cool burns'. Such practices are learnt over generations and generations of listening to and working with the land.

Aunty Rev Dr Denise Champion talks of Yalta Wandatha – the land is still speaking. This week, Denise launched her second book "Anadij" Always was, always will be... this phrase has become

a catch cry for land rights... This always was and always will be Aboriginal land... but that is not where the phrase originated.

Anaditj is a state of being. ...

We go back in time and recognise and acknowledge the past as we walk into the future. You have to know where you come from to walk confidently into the future. You're not making it up then: you're walking with the weight of history behind you. [Aunty Denise Champion, Anaditj, 2021. P.19]

Many of us will have some time this weekend to take a walk in nature or at least tend to a pot plant on a balcony. Perhaps we should look and listen to the land. Perhaps we should contemplate the life of God before us and beyond us - surrounding us, then perhaps we can Centre ourselves on God, instead of expecting God to Centre Godself on us.

We can be confident because we have a place in God's heart. We wait and we watch and we let God work in our spirits. Our faith can grow... from small seeds into something that spreads beyond our imaginings.

Empowering the Community's Spirit

Offering and Announcements

Communion Song of Invitation – TiS 511 Let us break bread together

Let us break bread together with the Lord!
let us break bread together with the Lord!

*Chorus: As we travel through this land,
all God's children hand in hand,
Lord, fill all our living with your life.*

Let us drink wine together with the Lord!
let us drink wine together with the Lord!
Let us sing songs together with the Lord!
let us sing songs together with the Lord!

Chorus:

Let us all work together for the Lord!
let us all work together for the Lord!

Chorus:

Based on an African-American Spiritual Used by permission. CCLI 65422

Thanksgiving

God be with you
and also with you

Lift up your hearts
we lift them up to God

Let us give thanks to the Risen Christ
It is right to give our thanks and praise

we give thanks for friends and strangers
we give thanks for justice, love, peace and freedom
we give thanks for life that has brought us to this moment in time
we remember the stories from our tradition...
we remember how Jesus had a meal with his disciples
Jesus broke bread and gave it to them

this is my body given for you
each time you do this, remember me
Jesus passed a cup of wine to his friends
this is my love and blood poured out for you
each time you do this, remember me
together may we re-imagine the world
together may we work to make all things new
together may we celebrate possibilities and hope

Song of Invocation: Spirit of Dreaming come (Alison Campbell-Rate)

1. Spirit of truth, come to us now,
breathe your word into us.
Plant in our hearts your wisdom and love,
speak your kindness through us.
Spirit of dreaming come, make of your people one.
Spirit of truth, enter our dreaming now.
2. Spirit of grace, come to us now,
break into our silence.
Nourish our hearts with healing and joy,
sing your love song through us.
Spirit of dreaming come, make of your people one.
Spirit of grace, enter our dreaming now.

Spirit of hope restore us,
go before us,
lead us through famine and feast.
Spirit of faith uplift us,
take and gift us for
loving the last and the least.
3. Spirit of light, come to us now,
shine into our darkness.
Bring to our hearts your longing for life,
kindle peace between us.
Spirit of dreaming come, make of your people one.
Spirit of light, enter our dreaming now.

Words and music: Alison Campbell Rate © 2013. STU Publishing. CCLI 65422.

Bread and Wine

We break open the story!
We share the promise!

The body of Christ keep you in eternal life
The love of Christ keep you in eternal life

[Communion is shared]

Prayers of the People –

You have given yourself for us.

We give ourselves for others.

You call us to love and serve you
with body, mind, and spirit

through loving your creation
and our sisters and brothers.

We pray for the sick, the lonely, the despairing...

We pray for carers, community leaders, hope-bearers.

We pray for the cold, the homeless, those who suffer abuse...

We pray for crisis workers, emergency services, peace-makers.

We pray for those who are afraid and those who are angry...

We pray for safety and comfort. We ask to be bearers of love and hope.

Open our hearts in compassion
and receive these prayers
on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.

Sending Song – TiS 658 I the Lord of sea and sky

1 I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord; Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

2 I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord; Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame;
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord; Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

Daniel L Schutte 1947-
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And may the Comm-Unity of God – Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer
Bless you now and always – **AMEN**

