

Welcome

Prelude

Acknowledgement of First Peoples

Although we gather from our homes and many other places, we continue to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians that have, for thousands of years, walked upon and cared for the lands upon which we are all individually located.

We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of our First Nations Peoples to this Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

We also pay respect to Elders past, present, and those who are rising up to become leaders of tomorrow.

Gathering and Centring

For those of you unable to connect via our website on the internet. I invite you to choose three hymns or songs to play at the designated places in the service.

In many ways the world is out of joint, and our lives are out of joint. Generally, we do our best, but often the news that surrounds us on a daily basis, especially news of the Corona virus can seem overwhelming. Like Jesus in today's gospel reading we need to take some time out to be alone with God.

Take some time to prepare a space where you can be comfortable and uninterrupted for the 30 to 45 minutes. Add items to your worship space such as a candle, a cross, a Bible or any other items sacred to you. Perhaps even a photo of someone special to you, or something that reminds you of Jesus' feeding of the 5000. If you are able invite someone to share the space with you, or just enjoy this spiritual practice alone.

If you have a candle, I invite you to light it at the time set aside during worship to light the worship candle.

Before you begin, take a moment to quiet yourself and to be aware of God's presence. Spend a moment in silence and gratitude. Take a deep breath and exhale. Then when you are ready continue on in worship.

The Peace

I invite you to share a sign of peace with those who may be with you at this time. If you are participating in this time of worship by yourself, then I invite you to name those who are dear and near to you or who are on your mind and say, "Peace be with you".

Peace be with you.

Lighting the Worship candle

Jesus said, I am the light of the world; the one who follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. We light this candle as a sign of Christ's presence with us. If you have your own candle, I invite you to light it now as I light this worship candle.

The candle is lit.

Song Jesus calls us here to meet him

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

Opening Prayer

Like the bare branches
of the winter trees,
I come empty,
transparent,
simple in my longing for you
and for the world that, with your love, might be.
I come to rest in your presence,
to hibernate for a time
in this undemanding worship space
where I might lean on you.
Warm me with the sun of your love.
Shower me with beauty that I might grow lush with grace.
Fill me with Spirit and send me forth
to be what I encounter in the silence of my prayer. **Amen.**

The readings

Introduction

Take some time to reflect upon these readings. What words or passages catch your attention? What do you see happening? How does that impact the way you hear these readings? Perhaps you might want to write or draw something that reflects your thoughts and feelings. Maybe there is a hymn or song that you are reminded of, if so, sing it or listen to it. Then when you are ready, continue in this time of worship.

Psalm 17: 1-7, 15

The Psalm reading, we hear today is a prayer asking God to listen to and rescue the psalmist (believed to be David), who affirms his commitment to follow God's ways and to be faithful, and to trust in God's willingness to answer his prayer. David pleads for God to pay attention because of his faithfulness, and to protect him from his enemies. Then our reading for today concludes with David rejoicing, by saying "as for me I will behold your face in righteousness."

17:1 Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. 17:2 From you let my vindication come; let your eyes see the right. 17:3 If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress. 17:4 As for what others do, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. 17:5 My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped. 17:6 I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me, hear my words. 17:7 Wondrously show your steadfast love, O saviour of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand. 17:15 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

Romans 9:1-5

In our reading from Romans Paul expresses his love and concern for his Jewish brothers and sisters, and celebrates the covenants, promises, law – and the Christ – that the Israelites received from God.

9:1 I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit-- 9:2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. 9:4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 9:5 to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Matthew 14:13-21

In Matthew 14:13-21, Jesus tries to get some time to himself after hearing of John's death, but the crowds find him, and end up, late in the day, in a remote place and without food. Jesus involves his disciples in the feeding of the crowd by instructing them to feed the crowd. But they object, saying that they only have a few loaves and a couple of fish. Jesus then feeds the crowds with the disciples' food, after which baskets of leftovers are gathered up.

14:13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14:14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 14:15 When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 14:16 Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." 14:17 They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." 14:18 And he said, "Bring them here to me." 14:19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 14:20 And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 14:21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Reflection: You feed them

In today's reading from Matthew we find that Jesus and his disciples find themselves face to face with a hungry crowd. It is not a small crowd either, Matthew tells us that there were about 5000 men. So that's a fair-sized crowd. But we find that the crowd was even bigger than that, because of that throwaway line right at the end of our reading, "besides women and children." So, the number would have been much larger, and when we think realise that. Suddenly that fair sized crowd becomes a very large one. I guess what Matthew is really trying to emphasise here is that there was a huge number of people there that day.

Now back to Jesus' and the disciple's dilemma, what are they to do with a huge number of hungry people. Jesus' simple answer to the disciples is "you feed them". I wonder what you would have said to Jesus if you were in the disciple's situation. Their response is "we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish". Well it seems that is all that is needed, because Matthew tells us, Jesus takes them breaks and blesses the five loaves and gives them to the disciples to give to the crowds, and when they collected what was left over they ended up with 12 full baskets. It was a miracle.

Whenever we start talking about miracles we end up with various and often very different points of views. For some this reading from Matthew presents them with a problem because they have difficulty with miracles. So, they explain the miracle away. For others trying to interpret this reading as anything else other than a miracle presents them with a problem because the only way, they can read this story is literally. But what if for a moment. We were to set aside whether or not the feeding of the 5000 plus took place just the way Matthew presents it to us. Or through some other kind of way and we were to concentrate on what we see Jesus getting his disciples to do here. What does this reading have to say to us then?

The disciples did not believe that they had anything to offer that could possibly meet the needs of the hungry people that they could see before them. But Jesus' message to them is, show me what you have, and let me bless it and through you give these hungry people what they need. But not only that, in the end, the disciples who thought that they did not have enough to provide the hungry people what they needed found out that the little that they did have to offer was more than enough to go around.

This story reminds us that Jesus did not act alone. He didn't find the loaves and distribute the food to all those people by himself. He asked his disciples to bring what they could find. Then he took what the disciples had blessed it, broke, and gave it back to them so that they could use it to feed the hungry people before them. It was Jesus' disciples that gave the food to the crowds. It was Jesus' disciples that provided them with enough to satisfy everyone, with plenty left over to feed even more.

I think this story tells us something very fundamental about discipleship, and that is It requires Christ's followers to be involved in the work Christ is doing. Christ's disciples are challenged to reach out to the hungry to those who hunger for meaning, for justice, for acceptance, and for life. But not only that, to trust that, when we reach

out, with what little we may think we have, that it is enough to provide the life sustaining food that those who hunger need.

Because if we read this passage right, it doesn't require a lot of us. God takes what we offer, even if it's only a little bit, like a few loaves and a couple of fish, and multiplies it. In other words, God begins with what we have and what we give and uses it to bless and nurture those around us. God takes the smallest that we can offer and multiplies it into more than we can ever imagine.

We can look at the world around us, a world needing to be fed physically and spiritually, and immediately begin to worry about our assets. Jesus, however, is calling us to look beyond the logistical problems of addition and think about multiplication.

People hungry for their next meal, hungry for God, hungry for grace, hungry for a chance to change their lives are always with us, and in this story from Matthew, I think Jesus says to us. "You feed them."

Rather than scratching our heads and throwing up our hands in futility when faced with the enormity of need around us, Jesus invites us instead to take inventory. Asking us "what do you have to offer," and although you may think it is nowhere near enough, Jesus reminds us it is far more than you may think. For Jesus takes what little we have to offer blesses it, and uses it to achieve amazing things so that all can be fed.

There are so many who need to be fed, and we can't just rely on Jesus or a select few to provide them with the food they need. We need to provide the food as well.

If you can pray, then pray for someone
If you love being around people, then visit the lonely
If you have the gift of encouragement, then encourage others
If you're a good listener, then listen to someone who needs to talk
If you like to help people, then help someone
If you like to..... well you can think of what that is and what you should do yourself.

Doing these things doesn't ask a lot of us, but it can make a major difference in the lives of others.

Imagine what would have happened if the disciples didn't bring what little they had to Jesus.

Over 5000 people would have gone hungry.

Today people are still hungry, and in this reading, Jesus reminds us, there is no need to turn them away. You feed them

Points to ponder

What small thing is it that you have to offer to God?

In what ways in the past has God used and blessed what you have to offer?
Where is Jesus saying to you. "You feed them?"

Song Brother Sister let me serve you.

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

Offering and prayer

As the disciples offered five loaves
and two fish to feed a multitude, we offer our gifts, O God.
With your grace, may our gifts be transformed into
food: water and bread, justice and peace.
In the name of the generous One. **Amen.**

Communion

Narrative of institution

Creator God, in the beginning you lifted the dust
and breathed your life into it,
creating all that was from all that is and all that will be.
From the very first moment an eternal dance-
life from death
new creation from what once was something else.
And in that eternal moment
From the dust of what was
you formed the universe and all that is-
plant, animals, flowers and trees,
the deepest valleys, and widest of oceans
all of it made in your image
unique and connected,
independent -yet co-existent and co-dependent.
Chaos to order and order to chaos.
And together with everything else
You also created us.
Humanity in all its wonder, and glory
With hearts to love, creativity to share
Ingenuity to think and to imagine
things beyond that which we see.

Sharing

On the night before his arrest
Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God
Broke it and said
'This is my body, broken for you;
each time you break bread and eat it in this way,

remember me.'

And in the same way
he took the cup, gave thanks to God
and then gave it to all who ate with him and said
'This cup is the new covenant-
sealed with my blood that is spilt for you;
each time you drink in this way,
remember me.'

And so we do as our Lord commanded

In this empty plate we choose to see the world's hunger.
We remember that millions of people, this day,
lack bread for Communion, bread for breakfast, bread for life.
We acknowledge that we ourselves hunger, this day,
in ways that no earthly bread can satisfy.

Hospitable God,
meet us in our unmet hungers
and help us to put our abundance at the service of the poor.

In this empty cup, we choose to see the world's thirst.
We remember that millions of people, this day,
lack wine for Communion, fruit for juicing, water for life.
We acknowledge that we ourselves thirst, this day,
in ways that no earthly cup can quench.

Hospitable God, meet us in our unmet thirsts
and help us to put our fullness at the service of the empty.

Invocation

Pour out the Holy Spirit on this empty plate, this empty cup, that they may be for us – even in their emptiness – the body and blood of Christ. So that we may take his Life into our lives, and be taken and blessed, broken and given for the world.

Plate and Cup

We hold up the empty plate...
It is Christ who is the bread of life,
Who satisfies the hungry heart.

We hold up the empty cup...
It is Christ who is the cup of hope,
Who revives the thirsty.

We place the plate and cup on the table...
Reminding us that these are

the gifts of God
for the people of God.

In faith and hope, we hold out our empty hands...
In these empty vessels and in our empty hands,
we celebrate the mystery and wonder of the empty tomb.

In our hands and in our hearts,
we leave space for resurrection,
for new life, for new meaning.
We hold the sorrows, prayers and hopes
of the world before you, O God.
May your Spirit flow among us and beyond us,
drawing us into loving and caring for your world. **Amen**

adapted from <https://ameliakoh-butler.blogspot.com/p/the-sacrament-of-empty-hands.html>

Prayers for Others *(by Charles Mailler Weston Creek Uniting Church)*

Lord we thank you that you ask us to bring to you the things weighing heavily on our hearts, to share with you our deep concerns in the full knowledge that you hear our prayers and deal with them in your own way and in your own time bringing comfort and peace to our hearts.

In these difficult times of pandemics and job loss when people's futures are uncertain, we pray for governments around the world for those whose decisions will affect the whole of your creation; for those who ignore the implications for future generations that might ensue.
May the leaders act with justice, compassion and wisdom to bring hope to those whose hope has dimmed.

Lord make us channels of hope healing and wholeness to those who are broken and facing times of darkness and despair.
In this time of silence, we bring to you the names of those known to us and are in need of God's love and presence at this time.

SILENCE

Lord we pray for the elderly who are so often confused and fearful in a fast-changing world and who feel isolated and vulnerable in a world seemingly designed for the young, fit and active. Give us the love and compassion to stand with those who stand alone.

We pray for ourselves. Teach us new words to say, new things to do and new lives to live that we may, by the power of your spirit be ever more open to your life-changing world transforming grace. Help us to realize all over again our uniqueness in your sight. Teach us once more that our value is measured only by the empty cross and the empty tomb.

Father we come in Christ to pray for the church and the world. We pray for Christians everywhere that they might come to you to offer their time their talents and themselves in the service of Christ's church. May we be faithful stewards of your good news leading others into a new and meaningful way of life. May we be full of grace in our dealings with those around us showing God's love day by day.

Widen our vision, deepen our faith and give us the humility to be open to your leading in our lives that we might through the power of prayer and your gentle leading be a force of change in your world.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are yours.
Now and for ever. **Amen.**

Song Christ be our light

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

Blessing

As we move away from worship space,
may we carry in our bodies and souls
a silent stillness that enables deep awareness.
May we live out the grace and compassion we've received
leading us to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

May the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ and
the communion of the Spirit be with you now and always. **Amen**