

Welcome

Prelude

Acknowledgement of First Peoples

We acknowledge the traditional caretakers of this land as the keepers of ancient knowledge and whose cultures and customs continue to nurture this land today. We honour the presence of these ancestors who reside in the imagination of this land and whose irrepressible spirituality flows throughout the land. We pay respect to elders, past, present and those rising up to be 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.

Before we begin this time of worship together. I invite you to set up your own worship space. Decorate it with a candle or a cross, or a symbol that in some way reflects forgiveness.

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

Before you begin, take a moment quiet yourself and to be aware of God's presence. You may want to spend some time in silence, or you might want to take some deep breaths and let go of any anxiety or concerns that you may have, and hand them over to God. Then when you are ready begin your time of worship.

The Peace

When we greet one another with peace it expresses our desire for tolerance and kindness and signifies our hope for the future. For it is when we wish peace that we feel one of the strongest and natural senses of compassion towards one another.

I invite you to take this opportunity 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

In a world that seems to be darkening every day, we are called to be "Light" in the midst of this dark world in which we live. Jesus is the power source of the "Light" that lives inside us. His "Light" will never go out, and so we light this candle to remind us that the light of Christ is always with us.

Song TIS 745 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

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

O God, you are the gathering one
who calls us into community
with each other
to love and work,
to support and heal.

You are the gathering one
who calls us into community
with all people;
to bring justice and hope,
freedom and truth.

You are the gathering one
who calls us into community
with the whole creation;
to live in harmony,
to cherish and renew.

May this time of worship
and the service of our lives
Reveal our thanksgiving
and our wonder of your care for all of creation.
This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The readings

Introduction

Take some time to reflect upon these readings. What words or passages catch your attention? What do you imagine the surroundings looked like where these readings take place? How does that impact the way you hear them or how they speak to you? Perhaps you might want to write your thoughts or feelings down, 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 on in this time of worship.

Psalm 114

Psalm 114 is a song describing God's mighty deliverance for Israel out of Egypt, and through divided waters and shaking mountains. This psalm emphasises God's power displayed, his provision supplied to the children of Israel, and that he is still their God. The implication being that he can still unfurl his power, and that the world must therefore take notice.

¹When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,

²Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion.

³The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back.

⁴The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.

⁵Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back?

⁶O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs?

⁷Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob,

⁸who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.

Exodus: 14:19-31 and 15:1-2

The Israelites have finally been freed from their oppressors and have begun their journey towards the Promised Land. But the Egyptians, with all their power and might have caught up to them at the edge of the sea, and it seems as though they will face certain death. But, then, a miracle takes place. The sea splits, they cross upon dry land, and the Egyptians are drowned.

The God seen in this passage is a powerful God, a God that has control over the very waves of the sea. This God is a God that is stronger than the gods of the Israelites oppressors. This is a story of justice. Egypt is a brutal regime built on the backs of slaves, with Pharaoh caring more about maintaining his power and comfort than recognising and honouring the humanity of the Israelites.

¹⁹ The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰ It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night. ²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²² The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴ At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵ He clogged^[a] their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

15 ¹Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. ² The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Matthew 18:21-35

Matthew 18:21-35 offers an extraordinary glimpse into Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of heaven where those who appear as the weakest are embraced as the most treasured. After Jesus' down-to-earth teaching about how to deal with wrongdoing or sin against a fellow believer, Peter follows up with his own question: What is the limit to forgiveness? It is likely that Peter thought his response of "seven times" was extremely generous. But Jesus' response not only expands those limits but redefines the kingdom in terms of unlimited mercy and grace by telling the parable of the merciful king and the ungrateful slave.

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Reflection: *by Joan Pratt South Woden Uniting Church*

Reflection

This morning I would like us to think about forgiveness and the future and I am going to start with two little stories:

- When I was about 11, I had long hair that I did in plaits with a ribbon on the end. The ribbons hung on the back of my cupboard door. For some reason, my little brother then aged about 4 became very angry with me for something I had done and he went into my room and cut up one of each pair of hair ribbons and left them lying on the floor. When I found them, I was furious and I grabbed him and gave him a good spanking. My mother said she didn't need to punish him, I had done quite enough.
- In later years neither of us could remember what my initial crime was that made him so angry and we were both able to tell the story with a laugh. This may be an example of an initial lack of forgiveness but later reconciliation.
- The second story comes from the With Love to the World notes - two former prisoners of war are discussing their experiences. One says, "Have you

forgiven your captors yet?" The other replies "I can never do that" . His friend concludes "then they still have you in prison, don't they?"

Forgiveness can be defined as "an individual, voluntary, internal process of letting go of feelings and thoughts of resentment and anger toward someone who we believe has wronged us, including ourselves."

Psychologists say that feelings of anger have been shown to contribute towards poor health and specifically coronary heart disease. Studies have shown that reliving painful memories and harbouring resentment have a negative effect on emotional well-being and physical health. Thus, people who forgive experience more life satisfaction and less depression than others.

Jesus was pretty clear about the importance of forgiveness and restoring damaged relationships – when Peter asks how many times he should forgive someone, Jesus says 77 times – it's hard to imagine how you could keep count. Then he tells the disciples a story about a rich man who forgave his servant a debt of ten thousand talents ie millions of dollars. Reeling from this generosity, the servant goes out and refuses to forgive a person who owes him a hundred denarii ie a few dollars. The rich man finds out and puts his servant in gaol. Now this is a story with exaggeration for effect. But the message is clear – God wants us to forgive each other, just as he forgives us.

Recently, we have seen on TV the trial of Brendan Tarrant, the Australian man convicted of the New Zealand mosque massacres. In what has become modern practice, people who have been injured were able to come before the court and the perpetrator and give their victim impact statement. All were distressed, and all spoke of the effect the carnage had had on their lives. Some expressed their anger clearly and wanted the man to rot in hell. One woman I heard said "I forgive you". How could she do that? In all the hurt and the lifelong sorrow, she was able to make that personal internal decision not to hold onto her anger against the perpetrator and I hope that will be healing process for her. It doesn't mean that the massacre didn't happen, it doesn't mean that he shouldn't stay in prison but it does mean that she herself will move on in her life and will not retain a cancer of resentment inside her.

Why is it sometimes so hard to forgive someone (or oneself) or even acknowledge the need for forgiveness? Bill Loader points out that holding on to a grudge gives us power over a person. Note that phrase 'holding on' – this is deliberate, it is intentional. It is also costly to forgive because it acknowledges that we can be vulnerable people – we are able to be hurt, we are not tefflon coated and we sometimes find it hard to acknowledge this.

But, if we hold on to resentment, we stay in the past, we prevent ourselves from moving on, we in fact reinforce the harm that the other person has done to us. God is for-giving, God is giving – God allows us to swallow, to take a deep breath and to move forward. Forgiveness draws a line under the past and opens the door to the future.

In some ways, an act of forgiveness is like the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea. Rev Ian Diamond, writing in the With Love to the World notes, calls this the "crucial saving event of the Old Testament". The Israelites were suffering at the hands of the Egyptians. God promised to bring them out of their slavery and into the land of milk and honey – the promised land. The defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea freed the Israelites and set

them on their journey to the promised land. It took them a while to get there but that's another story.

Have you been through a Red Sea experience lately – faced with a difficult problem, crying out to God and brought through safely to the other side? Victory for one does not necessarily mean death and destruction for another – it did for the Egyptian soldiers – but coming into safety can just be an individual thing.

My personal example is just that. When you are a solicitor advising people and acting for them in negotiations and litigation, you are not always going to win and you are not always going to achieve an outcome that satisfies your client. It's over 20 years since I retired as a solicitor but there are times when matters come back into my mind. Recently, there have been a couple of things that have been very intrusive and I was just not able to get them out of my mind. The reading and thinking and praying I have done in working on this reflection has brought me through to the other side – these things no longer shackle me, they still exist there in the past but they are past and are no longer holding on to my present. It felt as if I was walking with a wall of water on either side of me but when I got through, what was behind me was no more, I was relieved of the past, I was thankful to God and the rest of my life was in front of me.

When we are hemmed in, when we are resentful against someone who has harmed us, when we are nagging at ourselves over what we have done or not done, what can we do to bring ourselves back to life? Consider the following:

- Lay it out before God -
- Think of the other person's point of view – what caused this problem?
- How can I express forgiveness to another or to myself?
- Is restitution possible?
- Leave the past in the past – cross through the Red Sea in the present and move on into the future.

Prayer

Forgiving God, inspire me to live with the grace to forgive others, the humility to discern my own need for forgiveness and the strength and decision to move on from the past to the future. AMEN

REFERENCES

Daily Bible reading guide, With Love to the World, Volume 16, number 4, pages 28-9
Rev Emeritus Professor William R G Loader <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtPentecost15Ord24>
<https://positivepsychology.com/psychology-of-forgiveness/>
<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/weekly-worship/monthly/september-2020>

Song Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

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

Loving God we have a variety of reasons
for offering these gifts to you,

but whatever the reason,
whatever might be our purpose,
we ask that you will
accept these gifts
as a token of our abiding love:
and use them to bring peace, justice
and comfort to all the world, **Amen.**

Prayers for Others *(by Keith Fairbrother South Woden Uniting Church)*

Prayer from the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly:

Loving and compassionate God, you call us to love our neighbours and to be bearers of your hope and grace in our world.
Expand our hearts and vision to respond with compassion to those around us, who are struggling in this time of uncertainty, anxiety, grief and suffering.

Give wisdom and strength to our health workers, and government officials, as they provide leadership in bringing our country through this crisis.

We bring before you and into our hearts and minds:
Those whose work and income are uncertain.
Those who are isolated.
Those who are fearful of an unknown future.
Those who are homeless, and all those who offer them support and care.
Those who are involved in aged care
– our agency leaders, staff and residents and their loved ones.
Businesses whose futures are uncertain
– their leaders and staff, school staff and students.
Those with health conditions that put them at greater risk.

Give wisdom and care-filled discernment to all our Church leaders:
– our Councils, and local congregations, as we seek to creatively live out our worship, witness and service in ways that offer Christ's life-giving love and presence.

We pray for the congregations of Weston Creek, South Woden and St James. May we be a welcoming, inclusive, and outward looking Christian communities that nurture spirituality and faith and encourage service.

Strengthen and sustain us to be your people
– shaped by your abundant grace, bearers of your generosity and overflowing love

Through Christ our Light and Hope, we pray, Amen.

Song Be Thou my vision

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 you have been forgiven,
Go into the world

that needs your forgiving, healing touch.
Bring peace and hope to others,
sharing God's love with them.

As you go,

May the blessing of the Father,
The Son, and Holy Spirit

Be with you, ***Amen***