

## **Welcome**

## **Prelude**

### **Acknowledgement of First Peoples**

We acknowledge the traditional caretakers of this land our First Nations Peoples as the keepers of ancient knowledge whose cultures and customs continue to nurture this land today. We are thankful for the community that we share together now, and we pay our respects to their elders/leaders, both past and 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.

We come to hear the stories of other people in another world long ago.

We come to hear the stories that are also about us today in today's world.

As we do, we ask God to give us ears to listen, eyes to see, hearts to accept what God says to us through this time and in our sacred texts.

Although we may not be able to gather together in one place. We are entering into a sacred space together from our own individual places. As we begin this worship service, I invite you to set up your own worship space with a Bible, a candle or a cross, or a symbol that in some way reflects being on a journey.

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

Let's take a moment to quiet ourselves and to be aware of God's presence. You may want to spend some time in silence or listen to a hymn or song. Perhaps you might want to take this opportunity to let go of any anxiety or concerns that you may have, and hand them over to God. Then when you are ready continue in this time of worship.

### **The Peace**

Take a moment to share a sign of peace with those who may be with you. 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**

Christ the light shining in the darkness  
sparked a movement and a new understanding of God.  
We light this candle as a visible reminder  
of the radical inclusivity shown to us by Jesus,  
who calls us to follow him.

*The candle is lit*

**Song**            Be still for the presence of the Lord

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**

Creator and sustainer of all things, just as Jesus emptied himself to be one with your will, we too seek such a deep understanding of your will in our souls.

May we learn to let go of all that distracts and hinders us from being one with you. As we see ourselves surrounded by the truth of your presence, may we see ourselves as you saw us when you created us in your image.

May this worship remind us of who we are and what you call us to be as we celebrate our faith, as we affirm the joy of being in your presence, and as we offer all our praise and humble devotion to you.    **Amen.**

**The readings**

*Introduction*

*As you reflect upon these readings, what are you hearing? What are you thinking? What do you see? Take your time reading or listening to the passages, if a word or phrase grabs your attention, stop, read it again, reflect upon it, and let it speak to you and soak it in. Perhaps you might want to write your thoughts or feelings down or draw something. 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, move on.*

**Matthew: 21:23-32**

*Jesus had just made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey and being acclaimed as the Son of David, the fulfilment of the peoples hopes, prophecies and dreams.*

*He goes into the Temple and overturns the tables of the money changers. Soon he is approached by the chief priests and elders who ask him by what authority he does what he does. Instead of answering their question, Jesus ends up asking them a question, which sets up a whole discourse about the baptism offered by John the Baptist. Is it from heaven (of divine origin), or is it of human origin? Then through the parable of the two sons Jesus challenges the chief priests and elders to state who they believe actually did the will of the father.*

<sup>23</sup> When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" <sup>24</sup> Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup> Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe

him?' <sup>26</sup> But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." <sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

<sup>28</sup> "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' <sup>29</sup> He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup> The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. <sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

### **Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16**

*This psalm has two main purposes: to praise and to instruct. All the bits of God's help to Israel during the Exodus is in this psalm, and all the complaining and ingratitude of the Israelites is missing. Its lesson is that history must not repeat itself. The people must never again be unbelieving.*

<sup>1</sup> Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

<sup>2</sup> I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,

<sup>3</sup> things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.

<sup>4</sup> We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.

<sup>12</sup> In the sight of their ancestors he worked marvels  
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.

<sup>13</sup> He divided the sea and let them pass through it,  
and made the waters stand like a heap.

<sup>14</sup> In the daytime he led them with a cloud,  
and all night long with a fiery light.

<sup>15</sup> He split rocks open in the wilderness,  
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.

<sup>16</sup> He made streams come out of the rock,  
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.

### **Exodus 17:1-7**

*In Exodus 17, the Israelites have camped at Rephidim, but there is no water to drink. The complaining that was so prevalent earlier on in their journey resurfaces, and this time, it intensifies with quarrelling. They say to Moses, "Give us water to drink" Moses interprets the people's demand for water to be a test of Yahweh.*

*So Moses goes back to God again, complaining about the people: "What shall I do with this people?!" God tells Moses to take the staff he used at the Nile River and to meet God on the rock at Horeb, from which water will flow when Moses strikes it with his staff.*

## Water from the Rock

17 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup> So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?" <sup>3</sup> But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" <sup>4</sup> Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

<sup>5</sup> The Lord answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup> I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And he called the place Massah<sup>[a]</sup> and Meribah<sup>[b]</sup> because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

**Reflection:** *by Rev. Dr. Ross Kingham Weston Creek Uniting Church*

Reflection **SOURCES OF FAITH**

## INTRODUCTION

Our youngest child, when she was a tiny tot, would sit in the back seat of the car as we set out from Duffy to drive, say, to Sydney, and as we drove towards Civic she would say, "Are we nearly there yet?"

In these crisis days, the entire world seems to be saying, "Are we nearly there yet?"

We are people, a community, on a journey. That's who we are! We are not there yet, but we know that we are on the way!

In a game, the not knowing, the false trails, the missteps, all add to the intrigue and challenge of the exercise.

But often in life, the not knowing, and the setbacks, can be very disturbing. (Although it is also true that in the face of such experiences we can turn to humour: The old Dubliner, asked by a tourist for directions to Galway, said *"If it is going to Galway that you want, I wouldn't start from here!"*)

But the truth is that, especially in these times, many, many people are finding that their plans, their travels, their businesses, their trades, their work-life plans, their financial situation....have been destroyed

## A JOURNEYING PEOPLE

The Bible pictures Israel as a people on a journey, as generation follows generation through the years, always being led to a sure destiny.

BASIS OF UNION - "The United Church declares that she belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end"<sup>1</sup>

## THIRST

A journeying people will thirst, as we find in the story in Exodus 17. This is how it is for many of us and our loved ones and friends. Desperately thirsty, yearning for the knowing that there *is* a path ahead.

Searching for meaning; searching for hope; searching for guidance.....

Thirst is one of the most powerful spiritual symbols in all of scripture. As dehydration draws the whole of our physical being to a longing for water, so a spiritual void will draw our spirits into a search for deeper meaning for our lives. The Psalmist expressed it this way, "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." (Psalm 42:1-2)

Or... "I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land." (Psalm 143:6).

## **SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT, IN A 'GOOD' CHURCH, EVERYTHING IS GEARED FOR THE COMFORT OF THE MEMBERS WHO ARE MAKING A JOURNEY.**

....A more apt image may be that of an ambulance ferrying a patient to hospital....it may be a bumpy and difficult ride, but the hope is there that a good outcome awaits!

In fact, all communities of faith are nothing more than human organisations, which receive and share the light of Christ. It is to be expected that we will stub our toes and experience thirst if we are journeyers.

Read vv. 1b-3. 17 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup> So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

1. THE THIRST IS SLAKED...AGAIN AND AGAIN... AND AGAIN!

And we may find plenty of refreshment to slake that thirst.

God's promise is to *answer* our call for refreshment for the next step of the journey.... and God's provision is always sufficient, despite our sometimes-questioning response.

Read vv. 5-7. <sup>5</sup> The Lord answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. <sup>6</sup> I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> UCA Basis of Union, para. 18

'Take the staff...what you have in your possession that is a symbol of God's provision to you in the past... and go to the rock in Horeb'

Back to the roots of your faith! The Sinai...Horeb...place of meeting with God! Where you and others of the community of faith have been fed and blessed in the past!

That is the way to be newly opened to the Holy Spirit in the present.

Our neediness is met by the grace, the mercy, of God. God's provision is often found when we are in the hardest place.

*"Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."* **Exodus 17:6**

They were hungry. God sent manna. They were thirsty. God sent water gushing from a rock. Sometimes they were driven to that place of terror, doubting that God even existed..the place of utter aloneness.

Every day a miracle was right before their eyes. They just had to drink the water, accept the blessing. Another time he made the bitter waters sweet again, so they could drink. Over and over, God provided for their need.

As with the experience of our Aboriginal people, water is often to be found in the Australian outback if you know where to look for it. In some areas of limestone, for example, our original inhabitants would come to an apparently dry place and strike a rock with a stick (waddy). Like a miracle, the water would flow.

Our neediness is met by the grace, the mercy, of God. God's provision is often found when we are in the hardest place.

Looking for a miracle today?

... you will drink of the waters of the Spirit!

... 'Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see.'

(CS Lewis)

Like having someone receive from you a cry, a question, a dilemma, and know that what you have shared will forever be held in confidence, safe;

Like responding to sheer beauty, in a flower, or by the seaside, or in a woman or man, or child, in a person whose body is broken or scarred.....sheer beauty;

Like hearing the music of a harp, or violin, or flute, of an entire orchestra;

Like relishing and savouring another's contrary opinion, or another's affirmation, or another's tears;

Like reflecting on a psalm or an image or a biblical challenge that calls us to new vista of grace and courage.

'I daren't come and drink,' said Jill.

'Then you will die of thirst,' said the Lion.

'O dear,' said Jill, coming another step nearer. 'I suppose I must go and look for another stream, then.'

'There is no other stream, said the Lion.

(CS Lewis, *The Silver Chair*)

And so we pause and thank God for the streams of living water. Pure and life giving.

**Song**            Deep stillness

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**

Lord, you take delight in us  
and fill us with every good thing  
so that all who hunger may share in our joy.  
Receive what we offer as testimony to your goodness,  
and let these gifts lead to rejoicing  
in your church and your entire world;  
in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

**Prayers for Others**            *(by Libby Coates South Woden Uniting Church)*

We thank you for modern technology and the skills of inventors and researchers.

Especially at this time we give thanks for medical science which has shown a path through this time of pandemic.

For the medical workers who have laboured to bring the benefits of this technology to us and help to preserve life and to give us hope of a path through this time. Dear Lord. help us to appreciate our good fortune but also make us generous of heart so that all your people throughout the world can benefit and share in these advances.

For climate scientists and environmental workers who attempt to preserve and restore your creation. Guide us to find ways, however small, in which we can contribute to their work.

We thank you for the skills of those who make it possible for us to still gather together even in a time of social distancing. Remember those without the technology or skills to share in these virtual gatherings. Give them peace in their hearts even when isolated or lonely and make us alive to ways in which we can help.

Guide our thoughts and discussions in the congregational meeting which will follow this service. Let us never forget those who cannot take part and help us ensure ways in which their views can be heard too. **Amen**

**Song**            We are marching

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**

Go into this week,  
held together by the love of God  
clothed with the nature of Jesus Christ  
And reinforced by the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord **Amen.**