



Order of Service

25 July 2021

Welcome

Please use your time within this paper liturgy to create a moment of sacred clarity. When you need to put it down, then do so. If it takes you an extra cup of tea to find your meaning in the midst of it, then take that time. There is no rush, in fact there really is no order, no correct way to approach this liturgy. Please use it in a way that you feel called and compelled.

Preparation:

Find your favourite chair, put your slippers on and make yourself comfortable. Light a candle to remind yourself that you are not alone in this moment, but joined with the whole Church, those you know and those you are yet to meet. Be aware that God is deeply present in this place.

Centring Words (Ps 14:1a)

Fools say in their hearts: "There is no God." The faithful prove the foolishness of these words, not with their words, but with their actions.

Inspired by Love and Anger

Inspired by love and anger, disturbed by need and pain,
Informed of God's own bias we ask him once again:
"How long must some folk suffer? How long can few folk mind?
How long dare vain self interest turn prayer and pity blind?"

From those forever victims of heartless human greed,
Their cruel plight composes a litany of need:
"Where are the fruits of justice? Where are the signs of peace?
When is the day when prisoners and dreams find their release?"

From those forever shackled to what their wealth can buy,
The fear of lost advantage provokes the bitter cry,
"Don't query our position! Don't criticise our wealth!
Don't mention those exploited by politics and stealth!"

To God, who through the prophets proclaimed a different age,
We offer earth's indifference, its agony and rage:
"When will the wronged be righted? When will the kingdom come?
When will the world be generous to all instead of some?"

God asks, "Who will go for me? Who will extend my reach?
And who, when few will listen, will prophesy and preach?"

And who, when few bid welcome, will offer all they know?
And who, when few dare follow, will walk the road I show?"

Amused in someone's kitchen, asleep in someone's boat,
Attuned to what the ancients exposed, proclaimed and wrote,
A Saviour without safety, a tradesman without tools
Has come to tip the balance with fishermen and fools. Lyrics: John Bell © Wild Goose Resource Group/Iona Community

Call to worship:

Opening Prayer (Ps 14) God of steadfast love, fools say in their hearts: "There is no God." May our words and our very lives prove that we are not foolish. May our faith be as constant as the Southern Cross, and may others know that we are Christians by our love. Amen.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wurrundjeri people of this area as the traditional owners of this land. We acknowledge that our story has not been one of comfort and compassion, or learning and wisdom. We recognise that, as a people of God's justice, we are called to weave our stories together.

Opening Prayer

Prayer for Openness — Joyce Rupp

Free www.worshipwords.co.uk

Remember the Holy One is with you.
Bring to mind this loving presence within you and around you as you pray the following:

Open my mind to remember
your presence.
Open my mouth to speak
your wisdom.
Open my heart to extend
your love.
Open my hands to serve
you generously.
Open my whole being
to you.



Take a deep bow to the loving presence in you.

Psalm 46

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to *alamoth*. A song.

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- ³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

⁵God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.

⁶Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

⁸Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Prayer of Illumination

(Eph 3:18-19 NRSV) Hear anew the words of Paul: "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

Reading:

2 Samuel 11:1-15 - David and Bathsheba

¹¹In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

²One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

⁶So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So, Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

¹⁰David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So, he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

¹¹Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, ^a and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

¹²Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So, Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.

¹⁴In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

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Who is David and how did he become king?

1 Samuel 16:7 is our first unimpressive introduction to David. If we are to read the text, we find that the prophet Samuel has come looking for a warrior, king, leader of a nation to eventually replace Saul. Saul is a big, muscular strong man. He was clearly a warrior king. This is what Israel believed they wanted. A strong man. But the problem with Strong Man leadership is that it requires a show of strength and corrupted masculine violence. This is what Israel seemed to be wanting.

David is the 8th son of Jesse; he was the youngest son. All his brothers were built like Saul, but God tells Samuel that none of them are who he needs. David, who tends sheep, which is an allegory for kingship, is small and unimpressive and yet we can also extrapolate out this shepherd image as someone who must be wily and smart. We can glorify David, but I believe that in doing so we miss some of the power in his story.

If we look at the journey of the Hebrew people, enslaved and insignificant, and then overlay that on the image of David the diminutive shepherd we can have a wonderful image of the linking of King David with the journey of Israel. David, using his wit and intelligence overcomes a far stronger enemy, Goliath. We look at David playing the Lyre for Saul when Saul was going through his depressions - healing songs. Many of the Psalms are attributed to David, most likely his court, but we have an image of a David who can sing and celebrate, who can overcome great odds whilst being vastly out matched. This character of David is a man after God's own heart.

Yet, we have this reading today.

What we see in David is the characterisation of Israel. A runty beginning with an unimpressive people, outwitting larger more powerful foes, courageously being the people of Yahweh. Then, believing their own status and entitlement, making damaging and corrupt decisions, and suffering the consequences for generations.

Uriah was a Hittite. He was essentially a descendent of the group of people who lived among the Canaanites. If you recall the orders from God regarding the Canaanites, they were to be wiped out. Not just wiped out, but all their crops destroyed, and animals killed. Complete genocide. However, that clearly did not happen as we have Uriah the Hittite. Uriah, whose name means 'Yahweh is my light', is obviously Jewish with a Hittite ancestry. For our story this is important because it gives some context to what happens as David ruins him.

Being referred to as a Hittite means that we can expect little from him. If you think about the Good Samaritan, we have an expectation that the one Good Samaritan is the one in the story and clearly the rest are evil. Being referred to as a Hittite then means Uriah is supposed to be less than David. Anytime you read someone referred to as not Israel, for example a Samaritan or Hittite, remember that they are less than Israel and expect them to behave as such.

Where else in history have we seen people considered less value and then had their property taken from them? Their land, their dignity, their culture. Then we wonder why they behave without trust or behave with the outcomes of generational trauma. Do we see this in our own history? Do we hear comments like "woman prime minister" being used to deride someone because being prime minister is innately a man's job?

Bathsheba was Jewish. She was possibly as young as 13 and was bathing because she was coming off her time of menstruation. This is important for Jewish women as it is part of embracing religious fulfilment. As completely disgusting as this seems to us now, it is important to know that the average lifespan was only 40-50 years, medicine was not as good as now and the window for having healthy children, let alone surviving childbirth, was pretty small.

What it does say though, is that she was not pregnant to Uriah, likely because he had been away at war on behalf of David. In fact, he was at war on behalf of Israel, and even still, he was referred to as Uriah the Hittite.

I do feel for Bathsheba in this though. A young woman whose only capacity to ensure security for herself is to use her sex and intelligence. Because of her proximity to the throne, she understands the power structure and social expectations that surround the king, and his corruption would be impossible to negotiate without damage. The responsibility for her safety rests on the king and the integrity of those in authority.

Without jumping ahead in the story to find out what happens with the child, David is now contending with a potential Heir to the throne being born into the Hittites household. David's lack of self-discipline and arrogant entitlement had potential to completely destroy Israel. How would you react if you were in David's place? Consider how we respond when our lack of discipline, or our entitlement crystallises into a devastating realisation of destruction. We see this everywhere from households to climate change. We know the righteous action is confession and the difficult process of reconciliation. But how often do we develop a series of complicated actions and lies to hide our corruption, not just implicating ourselves but often those around us?

David's actions are far from Godly, they are all too devastatingly human. Wrapped up in concern for the individual rather than households and community, David is the anti-God image.

Uriah, for his part, understands exactly who he is. He is the image of integrity, despite never being accepted as "one of us", he lives with a sense of duty and honour. He forfeits his God given rite to impregnate his wife at the earliest possibility because his purpose is to Israel rather than his own household. Can we hear echoes of Jesus in Uriah? Perhaps when Jesus is told that his family is waiting inside a house, and he says "But this is my family" referring to those who need healing.

Uriah, for his integrity as one who does not really belong, serves God and Israel with a deep understanding of righteousness. It is his integrity that upsets David, his incorruptibility that David's kingly authority is worried about. Yet it is, paradoxically, Uriah's Godly righteousness that ultimately results in his murder. Uriah, the outsider, whose name proclaims the light of Yahweh, is killed by the State in order to protect the political elite from their own destructive actions.

Do we see that in our world today? Do we see those deemed as insignificant sacrificed on behalf of the world's powerful?

David's inability to reconcile his behaviour carries on for generations. Inter-generational trauma, entitlement and corruption run all the way through David's line, splitting the country and destroying the temple.

In this reading there is so much to learn and wonder about.

I would ideally like to be like Uriah, but often find myself acting out of selfish 'Davidness'. I see God in the righteousness of Uriah, but too often see corruption win the day through violence. I see Bathsheba as a vulnerable person who is doing her best to negotiate a corrupt system, and I see those who should be there to protect her sadly missing.

Our prayer today could be - May we learn wisdom from the ancient stories so that we live with the righteousness of Uriah.

Prayer of Confession

Beyond the Boundaries of My Failure

Christ, Lover of our struggles,

Embodiment of care and compassion.

Help me step up to the threshold of my hurt, disappointment, guilt or pain.

May it be the boundary of my growth into betterment,

That when I step into it I might discover strength and support in faith,

A gift for myself, from you and from others.

May my future be on the other side of my failure.
May failure simply enhance the story of my life,
Bringing an epic plot twist
And adding to the narrative of my growth and development.
May my faith not make things easier,
But resource me in the struggle and suffering which comes.
May I not seek greater comfort,
But, rather, may my faith make me stronger in the midst of my struggles.
Ambitiously I pray. Amen.
(Source: Jon Humphries, Facebook post, October 2019)

Finding you

June 23, 2021

I search the four chambers pulsing in black and white the septum they said might be malformed (but then changed their minds, and even though one artery's mostly blocked there's still, against all odds, flow) heart that tries too hard and loves too much, can you truly be in there "as close as my heartbeat"

This poem arose during a silent amidah meditation at AJR mincha / afternoon services. Cantor Michael Kasper invited us not to try to reach out toward God, but instead to feel where God already is with/in us.
<https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/>

Prayers of the People

Margot Kemke, Mountview

Dear Heavenly Father, we bring to you our prayers for all the people of the world at a time of uncertainty and apprehension due to the present Covid 19 virus, which has affected every nation, some with devastating results. We pray for the scientists, the medical personnel, all health professionals and Governments who are striving to contain this disease. Be near to them all and encourage their efforts, sustaining them when faced with a seemingly never-ending problem. We pray that all nations will receive vaccinations and that richer, healthier nations will help the less developed countries to receive the vaccines also.

In our world prayer cycle we ask for continuing prayers for the Central African countries of Burundi, The Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

These three countries have had civil wars, genocide and ethnic cleansing lasting for more than twenty years with terrible consequences for the population. In Burundi, one of the world's poorest countries, thousands have died, the economy is underdeveloped, the deforestation has resulted in limited agriculture, and corruption has resulted in poor health and education for the people. We pray for an improvement in the Government's handling of international aid and less corruption and a lifting of health and education standards.

The Democratic Republic of Congo, rich in natural resource, has suffered political instability, corruption and exploitation following its 6-year war. The conflict has resulted in hunger, violence and child exploitation but recently education and health care has been restored.

Rwanda has also experienced the ravages of civil conflict but now has a developing education system and a national health care scheme. O Lord we pray for these countries, for their Governments, that they will continue to improve economically and cease the human abuse which has caused so much distress in the past.

Here in Australia we pray for our Governments, federal, state and local. The lock-downs and problems caused by the virus here have challenged every authority and we pray for Your guidance and encouragement for all who have decisions to make on our behalf. We pray that we all will care for our communities and encourage each other, especially any who have anxieties or who find the present situation very distressing.

We pray for the minister and congregation at St John's Anglican Church in Blackburn. Within the UCA we pray for the Diamond Valley Parish, Diamond Creek and Hurstbridge. May these congregations find fellowship even though we cannot meet for the usual worship services. We pray for the ministers and multi-media people who are preparing video and literature services for us all to receive the word and keep in touch. We pray also for the staff and residents at Uniting AgeWell, Manningtree.

Here at Mountview, Blackburn North/Nunawading and Forest Hill we pray for our ministers, Rev. Tina, Rev. Peter and Rev. Pete who, under difficult circumstances, are leading our weekly worship and attending to Parish concerns. Be very near to them and their families.

We pray for all the members of our congregations and ask that Your love and care is extended to all, especially if there are special needs. We pray for any who have medical problems. We pray for our members who are in assisted aged care and may be unable to see their families at this time. O Lord, we thank you for your love and care for us and we pray that you will be with us all as we strive to be your servants and to do Your will.

These prayers we ask in Jesus name and pray as You taught your disciples –

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil,

for the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours, now and forever. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Loving Lord,

As I express my gratitude to you in prayer, may it be a pleasing, *joyful* sound to you.

Thank you, Lord, for your love. It brings me acceptance and significance.

Thank you, Lord, for your truth. It brings me guidance and direction.

Thank you, Lord, for your mercy. It brings me help and comfort.

Thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness. It brings me stability and strength.

Thank you, Lord, for your beauty displayed in the earth. It brings me joy and delight.

Thank you, Lord, for your way of redemption - the cross. It brings me salvation and regeneration.

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Create in Me a Clean Heart

By Keith Green, 1953-1982, copyright information not found

Create in me a clean heart, oh God

And renew a right spirit within me

Create in me a clean heart, oh God

And renew a right spirit within me

Cast me not away from Thy presence, oh Lord

And take not Thy holy spirit from me

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation

And renew a right spirit within me

Create in me a clean heart, oh God

And renew a right spirit within me

Create in me a clean heart, oh God

And renew a right spirit within me

Cast me not away from Thy presence, oh Lord
Take not Thy holy spirit from me
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation
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Create in me a clean heart, oh God
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Cast me not away from Thy presence, oh Lord
Take not Thy holy spirit from me
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation
And renew a right spirit within me

Benediction

Go into the fullness of life, with its wonder and worry. Know that you are not alone in your struggles for righteousness. God and the community of Christ walk with you.

Appendix

https://bythewell.com.au/?post_type=post&p=1004