



Introit – 703 As The Deer Pants – <https://youtu.be/sEXSfoeP7iw>

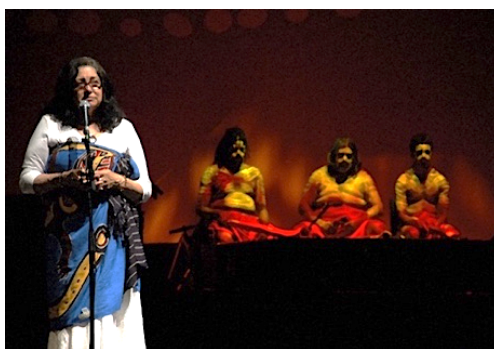
by CMM UCA Media

Welcome to our Worship Service

May you find the worship a blessing

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge those who were here before us, the first inhabitants of this place.
We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.



Auntie Joy at Parliament of World Religions 2009

Call to Worship

Based on Psalm 132

Lord we have endured hardship
Let your faithful shout for joy

Lord we seek the place where you dwell
Let your faithful shout for joy

Lord our God your place is within our hearts
Your kingdom is within us
Let the faithful shout for joy

Hymn 152: Joyful, Joyful – https://youtu.be/e_tzelwBAIE

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Prayer for Creation (avail: 20 Nov 2021) – <https://youtu.be/VM4cvRuheKM>

by Rev Tina

Prayer – Rev Pete

Grace to you and peace from the one who is, who was, and who is to come.
Grace from Jesus, the faithful witness and lover of our souls.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come.”

To the one who loves us and who frees us from our sins to God be the glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

Based upon Rev 1: 4, 8. (Adapted) Scifres, Mary; Beu, B. J.; From The Abingdon Worship Annual 2021. Copyright © 2020 by Abingdon Press. Used by permission.

Prayer of Confession – Rev Pete

(John 18, Rev 1) God of Grace, we feel threatened by forces that seem greater than ourselves. As Pontius Pilate taunted Jesus, daring him to spar over earthly power, we are tempted to lower ourselves to compete and compare with one another. Forgive us when we forget that we belong, above all, to your way and your truth.

When we feel inclined to fight or flee, let us instead seek refuge in your wisdom and your grace.

Guide us not to react badly, but to respond faithfully. Inspire us to answer insult with creative acts of love. Let us trust not in our own power, but in the strength of your love, which reigns in the heavens and on the earth forevermore. Amen.

Words of Assurance

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord, the one who loves you and frees you from your sin.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Amen.

Based upon Rev 1:8. Scifres, Mary; Beu, B. J.; From The Abingdon Worship Annual 2021. Copyright © 2020 by Abingdon Press. Used by permission.

Hymn 745: Seek Ye First The Kingdom Of God – <https://youtu.be/C6opXR4okM0>

by CMM UCA Media

Prayer of Illumination – Rev Pete

God who speaks to us from the cosmic to the intimate, who gently guides us to old and new wisdom, rumble your text in our hearts today.

Scripture Readings [NRSV]

Psalm 132: 1-18

O LORD, remember in David’s favor
 all the hardships he endured;
²how he swore to the LORD
 and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
³“I will not enter my house
 or get into my bed;
⁴I will not give sleep to my eyes
 or slumber to my eyelids,
⁵until I find a place for the LORD,
 a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”
⁶We heard of it in Ephrathah;
 we found it in the fields of Jaar.
⁷“Let us go to his dwelling place;
 let us worship at his footstool.”
⁸Rise up, O LORD, and go to your resting place,
 you and the ark of your might.
⁹Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
 and let your faithful shout for joy.
¹⁰For your servant David’s sake
 do not turn away the face of your anointed one.
¹¹The LORD swore to David a sure oath
 from which he will not turn back:
 “One of the sons of your body
 I will set on your throne.
¹²If your sons keep my covenant
 and my decrees that I shall teach them,
 their sons also, forevermore,
 shall sit on your throne.”

¹³For the LORD has chosen Zion;
 he has desired it for his habitation:
¹⁴“This is my resting place forever;
 here I will reside, for I have desired it.
¹⁵I will abundantly bless its provisions;
 I will satisfy its poor with bread.
¹⁶Its priests I will clothe with salvation,
 and its faithful will shout for joy.
¹⁷There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David;
 I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.
¹⁸His enemies I will clothe with disgrace,
 but on him, his crown will gleam.”

John 18: 33-37

³³Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”
³⁴Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” ³⁵Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”
³⁶Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”
³⁷Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

New Revised Standard Version Bible, © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

YOUNG AT HEART

Images of God for Children

Hymn 228: Crown Him With Many Crowns – <https://youtu.be/2jM0SuY1fH4>

by Fountainview Academy

Sermon – The Kingdom of God

In the name of the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen

What is the kingdom of God and where is it? The writers of the gospels struggled with answering these questions.

Luke’s gospel reminds us, the Kingdom of God is within us



Johns’ gospel teaches us we need to be born again to enter the kingdom of God, saying:

Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, they cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

These verses are associated with baptisms.



Matthew's gospel reminds us we need to become like a child, to enter the kingdom of God, to be open, trusting and accepting, to receive and be humble.



Mark's gospel has Jesus proclaiming:

The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news.

In today's gospel from John, Jesus tells Pilate: *My kingdom is not from this world.*

What does this mean?

Pilate didn't understand. His world was about power and violence. He was the Roman governor of a province and Herod was his puppet king. He had Jesus crucified to satisfy the mob and played with people. We can see this in how Jesus was crucified with a crown of thorns and a sign Pilate ordered to be placed above his head, a sign written in three major languages of the time, a sign meant to have a go at the Jewish people, saying:

"Jesus, King of the Jews"



Pilate did not know the truth. He asked: *What is truth?*

Thousands of years later we come to know of this truth in our hearts as we listen to the voice of Jesus in the gospels. We come to know the kingdom of God is a spiritual realm which God reigns over, and the hallmarks of the Kingdom of God include peace, love, freedom and salvation.

When we say the Lord's Prayer: *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth and in heaven*, we call on God.

Like the people of ancient times, we long for a better world and for the kingdom of God to come and to know it has come in our hearts, that spark of light and love within every one of us and when we find it, we do all we can to hold fast to it.

There are lovely images in the gospels that tell us more about kingdom of God, such as the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, one of the tiniest seeds in the world, which grows into a mighty bush or tree that shelters birds and provides shade to travellers who sit under the tree on hot days. Another image is leaven that a woman took and added measures of flour to, until it was leavened, a bit like adding yeast to flour and watching it expand and rise. These two images of seeds and rising and expanding dough tell us big things grow from little things. Once a seed of faith has been planted amongst us, it grows and grows. In the same way mission and our church will grow if we plant seeds and pray. Prayer forms the engine of mission and leads to ministry and growth.

John Wesley encouraged everyone to pray, and thousands came to Christianity through him. John went about on horseback and preached in the fields and people would often fall to their knees in prayer with tears in their eyes and change their lives after a seed of faith was planted in their hearts that grew into a deep faith and love for God.

The kingdom of God is like a treasure in a field which a man found and hid again, and then from joy over this find went and sold everything and brought the field. The kingdom of God is valuable to us and adds meaning to our lives and everything we do. We thirst for it and need to find it and when we do, we do everything we can to hold fast to it and keep it in our heart as our greatest treasure.

Another parable is that of the kingdom of God being like a landowner who owns a vineyard. He goes out in the morning looking for day labourers who probably waited in the village square. He employs some in the morning, and they agree to work for a set free. He returns later in the morning and employs more workers for the same wage, and at noon when it was getting hot, employs more, again for the same wage.

The workers he found later in the day just before sunset would have been workers no one else wanted to employ, the lame and disabled and he employed them too. When the time came to pay each worker, all were paid the same amount. Some workers employed in the morning didn't think it was fair that the others got the same wage when they worked all day long and they grumbled. The landowner told the: *You agreed to work for this amount.*

Take what is yours and go. I can do what I want with what is mine to give or are you jealous because I'm generous?

God is generous and there are no favourites. All are welcome. We are told the last end up first, into the kingdom, even those who turn to God in their last moments, enter into the kingdom of God, like the thief on the cross who showed compassion to Jesus as they were dying. Jesus promised him he would enter paradise that day.

We need eternal truths and a kingdom that is reliable, trustworthy, permanent and unchanging. We need anchors and rocks and stability, and we find that in God. We come face to face with God in Christ and his teachings.

His truth does not disappoint us.

The kingdom of God is within us, where the sure and steady love of God dwells and the light of God and the living waters of the Spirit. All this comes from the kingdom of God, and we come to know this through faith and prayer and through listening to the gospel.

We have just moved through a long period of time where our lives have been restricted and we have lived with anxiety and worry. Many are afraid to return to worship and I must admit I was worried about all of you. The leaders of the three churches within our cluster have done their best to keep everyone safe and be there for us and it hasn't been an easy reasonability. Each one of us has done our best to be there for one another and we have all gone the extra mile for one another. Earlier we said: *Let the faithful shout for joy.*

There's not much joy during lockdown. I was told that when the children's playgrounds reopened my granddaughter stood in the playground shouting for Joy: *The playground has opened. The playground has opened.*

Teenagers have struggled and many have developed mental health issues. They need support, patience, gentleness and encouragement. Elderly people have told me they felt lonely, bored and frustrated during Lockdown.

Parents have said: *O No!* Lockdowns meant working from home, home schooling and worrying about elderly parents. So much pressure.

Now we are hoping for a joyful Christmas with family and lots of joyful shouting of: Merry Christmas. We have held fast to our faith through all these lockdowns and discovered what count most in life, our loved ones and our relationship with God. Like the psalmist who strived to find a place for God in his life and heart, we have strived.

Now we are entering advent, a time of new beginnings and hopes, a time of new births, celebrations and giving thanks, a time to get in touch with the deepest longings in our heart and find a deeper connection with God.

C.S. Lewis said we have this inconsolable longing for connecting with something greater than us.

St Augustine spoke of God making us and drawing us to himself where our hearts are restless until we rest in God.

The Spirit within us stirs our heart to long for a closeness with God where nothing else in life satisfies this deep longing to enter into the Holy mystery of God.

This is the kingdom Jesus speaks of.

The kingdom that is not of this world.

Let us pray...

Lord, may we find your Kingdom within us

May we experience your Shalom and wholeness

May we be filled with your peace and love

May we receive life eternal and find our rest and our home in you

May we be blessed by you, amen

Quiet moment of reflection



This star is found in the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem

Offering Prayer

(about offering up ourselves and giving thanks to God for all we have)

Lord and giver of every good thing, we bring to you our lives and gifts for your kingdom, all for transformation through your grace and love, made known in Jesus Christ our Saviour, amen

Prayers of the People

by Michael Plumridge

Lord our God, saviour of the world through Jesus Christ; healer of the world, champion of the broken.
Please hear us as we pray today.

Lord this morning we pray for the countries of East Timor (Timor-Leste), Indonesia, Philippines, Australia's near neighbours to the north. We thank you for the bonds that we share with these countries, with, in pre-pandemic times, many Australian tourists visiting annually.

We thank you for our shared experiences and we pray for those suffering the effects of violence including the Bali bombing of 2002 in Indonesia. Lord, we thank you for the Australia and Timor-Leste Maritime Boundary Agreement – recognizing the rights of Timor-Leste – a relatively small nation of 1.3 million people. Lord with Indonesia and the Philippines among the most populous countries in the world, we ask that you bless these countries, and we ask that governments think and act creatively with regard to population issues. Lord we pray for Timor Leste; a country that has struggled for self-determination and self-government for many decades.

Lord, we give you thanks for the people of faith in this region and for their witness to your love and goodness. We are thankful also for the diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and religious beliefs. Lord, we thank you for the tolerance that exists among many religious groups and for those who have given their lives working for peace and harmony. Lord we ask that you grant strength to those who bravely work for human rights, justice, peace, and reconciliation. We especially pray for the National Council of Churches in the Philippines as it seeks to empower people through education and leadership programs. We ask you to bless the environmental movement in this region and grant strength to those who protest against exploitative mining, deforestation, and other environmentally damaging practices. Lord, we pray for the governments in each of these countries and we ask that the hearts of all government officials be moved to work effectively for the wellbeing of all their people.

We pray that institutionalised corruption will be exposed and dismantled, and that justice will be advanced. We pray for the prioritisation of peace in all negotiations both domestic and international. God of hope we pray that perpetrators of human rights violations be called to account. We pray for victims of violence, torture, drug and human trafficking; may they find safety and peace. Also, this morning Lord we pray for all those people natural disasters of all kinds. We acknowledge that this region is frequently affected by earthquakes, tsunamis and cyclones. We ask that you give strength to individuals and communities when disaster strikes and grant them courage to rebuild in the aftermath. In other prayers for the world, we ask that you be with the people of Afghanistan as they continue to face the dangers and the challenges of being governed by the Taliban. God of peace, be in your world. We also bring before you the escalating humanitarian crisis on the Belarus-Poland border, with refugees being refused entry into Poland and also being prevented from returning to Belarus. Lord be with Governments: give them hearts of genuine compassion for displaced persons. We pray also for aid workers as the need for food and shelter increases with the advancing winter.

Locally we pray this morning for Stairway Church, Whitehorse. We ask you to bless those who gather there, their ministry team and all who hold office.

We also ask your blessing on our brothers and sister in the Uniting Churches in Mernda and Plenty Valley.

Be with them we pray as they love and serve you.

We pray too for the Synod General Secretary. We thank you for all who hold office in the Uniting Church.

We pray today too for ourselves here in Whitehorse Cluster. Bless the ministers of the cluster and their families.

Be with us Lord in all of our activities great and small.

Help us as we gradually emerge from lockdown and become accustomed to the new normal.

Lord make us channels of your peace.

We pray this and all our prayers in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Candle Prayers



Hymn 102: Praise To The Living God – <https://youtu.be/s5Gmo1JzbCU>

by Eamon Younis – www.smallchurchmusic.com

Blessing – Rev Tina

**We go in peace
in the love of God
in the Power of the Spirit
May the Lord Bless and Guard us
May the Lord make His face shine upon us
and be gracious unto us
As we bring Christ's love
and peace to the world. Amen**

Benediction – Rev Pete

Christ, our all in all.
Bless both morning and evening.
Bless our waking and sleeping.
Bless our travelling and arriving.
Bless our working and playing.
Bless our listening and talking.
Bless our beginning and ending.
Bless both morning and evening.
Christ, our all in all.

Birch, John. God Beside Us: 100 Celtic Prayers. © John Birch, 2016. Prayers written by the author may be copied freely for worship. www.faithandworship.com

Hymn 778: Shalom To You Now – https://youtu.be/IiH_HdkWs74

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Pastoral Care Tips – Rev Tina



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Coming out of a long period of lockdown where many people experienced depression, anxiety, worry and fears, isn't easy. Many people may be still feeling tentative and cautious.

Teenagers have struggled. At their stage of life, identity formation and a network of peers are essential, but this hasn't been possible for many. Teenagers need prayers, patience, love and support.

It has been a long journey that's involved isolation and limitations where people's personal growth hasn't been able to happen. All the things that contribute to growth have been denied, to keep us safe. Perhaps venturing out requires a slow building up of confidence again. Things may be a bit tentative and we may feel awkward as people form new habits, reclaim what they want back in their life and let go of what they don't want to keep.

This is a slow process for some. The hardship of the past eighteen months or more may have led to a deterioration of health for some, where the idea of returning to Sunday morning worship is beyond some people's energy level.

Please let us know if this has happened to you.

We are exploring a mid-week communion service with afternoon tea. Family or carers or someone from our churches could provide transport.

If you're feeling not ready or able to return to gathered worship, please contact us and let us know how we can assist. Take things slowly at your pace and be gentler with yourself. There are many others like you. Things are slowly opening up and there are safeguards and church leaders are continuing to monitor the situation and keep us safe. I must admit throughout the lockdowns I was concerned for your wellbeing and super careful and cautious about visiting but now things have improved. Now most of us are free to go on walks, have a cuppa together and visit one another.

Prayer

Lord we are feeling a little anxious at times, a little tentative

When it comes to returning to work, volunteering, church, clubs, and more

We are worried about young children and teenagers and young adults

Their future and wellbeing

Many have struggled with mental health issues

Many have experienced physical deterioration

Lord we all need encouragement and confidence

Help us to be gentle and patient with ourselves

As we slowly embrace life again outside of lockdowns

Help us find joy again and a sense of fun and humour

As we come closer to advent – the time of new beginnings and the joy of Christmas

Bless us Lord and set us free and help us move on. Amen