

GATHERING & PREPARING

Gather some symbols on your worship table that represent hope and renewal:

- a clear jar of water,
- a potted growing plant, or fresh flowers, or greenery,
- a photograph of your community or family together, or
- a jar of precious oil.

Light Your Candle



Call to Worship based on Psalm 113

There is dew on the ground: God's blessing of life evermore.

There is a song in the air: God's presence in joyful melody.

Look! Behold how good and pleasant it is when we are together in worship!

It is like precious oil touching our skin – reminding us that we are God's own.

Look! Behold how good and pleasant it is when we are together in worship!

It is more precious than any gold – more perfect than any achievement.

Come, people of God. Let us worship in thanksgiving and praise.

And let us feel the anointing of God like the oil of forgiveness and the balm of healing.

Come, let us worship.

Acknowledgement of Country

Here is the Land
Here is the Sky
Here are your friends
Here am I

We stand together hand in hand
To respect and acknowledge

The original owners of the land
We're on Boon Wurrung country
We're on Bunurong country ...
(What is the land you are on?)

We commit ourselves to truth-telling and the seeking of reconciliation and healing in this country.



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

Opening Prayer

Loving Creator, we gather to take in your mercy.

May what comes from our lives be filled with your grace.

As we take in the beauty of music, the wisdom of words, the nourishment of silence, and the strength of fellowship, may the thoughts and actions that emerge in our lives

be inspired by your creativity and grounded in your truth.

Help us to recognize ourselves as part of your creation,

and to affirm that you do not hold us away in anger or judgment

but draw us near in forgiveness and joy.

As we worship today,

May we feel the embrace of your rejoicing heart.

Assure us of your unending forgiveness and love, we pray. **Amen.**

Let us make our confession: where we have failed each other and ourselves:

We say to God, the things that need saying.

<hold stillness & silence as you breathe in & as you breath out. 3x>

Prayer of confession

Eternal Forgiveness,
we have held so tightly
resentments & bitterness that imprisoned
our very spirit.

We are often bound by our
self-righteousness.
We are often restricted by our standards
of right and wrong.
We have not yet learned how to love with
truly generous hearts.

Help us.

Show us the ways of forgiveness that lead
us to free others from our
anger, resentment, bitterness, our
self-righteousness our judgement,
that we may be free
and renewed in wholeness.

Remind us again of the deep communion
we share with you,
Lead us to reconnect with each free of our
brokenness and failures.
Show us the ways of subversive
forgiveness,
which brings new life and creates the
pathways for healing.
Forgive us, we pray, and show us how to
forgive. Amen.

Words of affirmation

God knows
the freedom of forgiveness.
God does not
hold on to anger and resentment:
but rejoices as we join in the freedom of
letting go and beginning again.
In this, let us be assured of pardon.
Sin is forgiven: **Thanks be to God.**

Opening Hymn 693 Come as you Are

Come as you are:
that's how I want you.
Come as you are; feel quite at home,
close to my heart, loved and forgiven.
Come as you are: why stand alone?

No need to fear, love sets no limits;
no need to fear, love never ends;
don't run away shamed and disheartened,
rest in my love, trust me again.

I came to call sinners,
not just the righteous;
I came to bring peace, not to condemn.
Each time you fail
to live by my promise,
why do you think I'd love you the less?

Come as you are;
that's how I love you;
come as you are, trust me again.
Nothing can change
the love that I bear you;
all will be well, just come as you are.

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Publications, Melbourne



The Readings

Read - Matthew 15 (10-20) 21-28

Reflection - Rev. Jennie Gordon

Even the dogs ...

We have two dogs, a mostly white Border Collie named Xas and a mostly black Huntaway named Jasper. They currently sleep inside because it's cold and windy 'out there'. If we try to encourage them to sleep out on a milder winter night, Xas

gently and persistently knocks on the door until it opens. When we eat, they come close to the table and sit patiently and when we put down the cutlery, they come closer for scraps or snuggles. Sometimes we say, 'even the dogs...' These three pivotal words from Matthew's gospel break open the whole story, break open Jesus' heart, break open the possibility of



acceptance for those 'outside the fold'. Which is just as well, for all of us.

Hold on, we need to go back before we can go forward. In

the section of text that precedes this story of the woman from Canaan, (the verses in brackets) Jesus is teaching the disciples that it's what comes out of your mouth that defiles you. It's the words that you say and the way that you say them, not the food that you eat and the way that you eat it, that makes you clean or unclean. This is radical teaching. This rises above the purity laws. This makes the Pharisees angry. Go back and read them if you haven't already. That's ok – I'll wait for you.

So, Jesus tells the disciples, particularly Peter, to be careful with what comes out of their mouths, more careful than what they put into their mouths and whether their hands are clean, or not. (Peter would do well to heed this one, because it will be the words of denial that he speaks that are his undoing as Jesus approaches the cross.) Right on top of this teaching as they move from one region to the next, Jesus is confronted with this woman from Canaan. She calls out to him, begging for mercy and healing for her daughter,

naming him 'Lord' and 'son of David'. We don't know her name. We do know her ethnicity and that she does not belong to the 'lost sheep of Israel'. Jesus makes that clear, he was only sent, he says, to rescue a particular group of people. Why would he waste God's good food, meant for God's chosen children, on this (less than human) dog of a woman?

Did you see the Four Corners program hosted by Stan Grant? You can watch it on iView

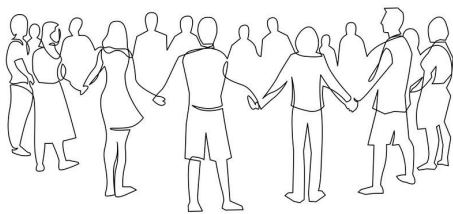
- <https://www.abc.net.au/4corners/>. It's titled 'I can't breathe'. It's a searing and confronting account of what it is like to live in a world that sees you as less than human because you have black skin. It's shocking and painful and Stan says things that we know but need to hear again and again until we stop seeing colour and start seeing humanity. The Black Lives Matter movement reminds me of this woman from Canaan, the voiceless crying out to be noticed, begging for what has, up till now, only been available to the privileged people; justice, peace, the right to live equal lives of freedom and hope.

Moving on in the story from Matthew's gospel, Jesus ignores this woman at first and she keeps crying out behind them. The disciples implore him to send her away. Make that noise stop. Make them stop. Stop the protests and the shouting and the whining about how hard it is... make them stop. But she persists, throwing herself on the ground in front of him. This woman from Canaan stops Jesus in his tracks. He calls her a dog, and she answers in the same language, so he might hear her; "Even the dogs..." There they are, those three pivotal words. Even the dogs. Jesus sees her. He sees her faith, her need, her insistence and her pain. "O woman," says Jesus, "O woman, of course

you deserve what you desire, just like the rest of us, so be it.” The translation I’m reading says, ‘And her daughter was healed from that hour.’

Three pivotal words. “I can’t breathe.” Words that beg for air. Words borne out of pain, suffering and death. Words to stop those of us who occupy a position of white privilege in our tracks. Words to open our eyes to our blindness and assumptions of power and worth. Words that beg for release, words to bring about a dismantling of injustice. Three pivotal words.

Jesus was changed in this encounter, he was moved. The unnamed woman opened his eyes to see that this healing power of love he was wielding wasn’t such a scant resource that it had to be reserved for a certain few. His world view, his understanding of his mission, had been challenged and changed. Thanks be to God, because I do want to be in with Jesus and I don’t share any DNA with the lost sheep of Israel. I’m quite clearly Anglo-Celtic. So, if Jesus can be challenged and changed, so can we, so can our world.



We can’t just walk on while people are calling out, ‘I can’t breathe.’ This is a pivotal moment in history, not just because of a global pandemic, but because we have a chance to change things. You might wonder about what you can do. We need to speak words of hope and healing. We need to speak the truth.

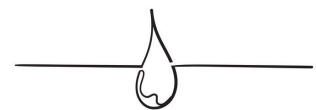
It’s what comes out of our mouths that defiles us. It’s how we speak about each other that leads to how we act towards each other. It’s how we understand and teach our history, and how we learn to tell hard stories of truth about invasion, dispossession, murder and the systematic and deliberate destruction of ancient culture and life. It’s about walking together, and listening to the stories.

Michael T. McRay in his book, *I AM NOT YOUR ENEMY*, (a must-read) says in his introduction; *Like Saul after the light, like the man from Bethsaida, many of us have been blind. We’ve been unable or unwilling to see the truth of our divisions. But the scales are falling from our eyes now. We’re beginning to look with eyes wide open, though our vision may still be blurred. We need wise others to meet us in our darkness and put hands on us so that we might finally see – wisely, with story.*

May this story of a woman from Canaan, and Stan Grant’s story and the stories of so many black deaths in custody and so many mothers pleading for healing for their children make us finally see – wisely. May it be so. Amen.

Prayers of the people

**Take a little oil
and watch it
drip or flow
onto the palm
of your hand.
Rub it gently
with your finger
and watch it as
it warms.**



**Remember that we are held in the palm
of God’s hand.**

Come before God with your prayers for one another.

Called to unity we are indeed kindred. We feel one another's pain and acknowledge how it is to feel deep compassion.

Lord have mercy.

As we cup our hands to 'hold' one another, we acknowledge the pain of grief and loss which is so real to many of us right now. We acknowledge the pain of change and adjustment in losing people, in losing relationships and in losing fellowship and connection.

Lord have mercy.

We hold before God those who are depressed or anxious. Those who have shame, or fear, or sadness.

Lord have mercy.

The tough times of the combination of bushfire and virus continue. Both weigh heavily on those who are impacted, and we are all impacted. Guide our decision makers into compassionate and loving choices.

Lord have mercy.

We hold the 'little ones', the voiceless and the desperate and those who plead on their behalf.

Lord have mercy....hear the cry of our souls. May your generous mercy be like warm oil to our pain.

Just as the oil flows, so also is the generosity of God. Let your own mercy and grace flow generously to others in gratitude for the mercy of God.

We bring all prayer, together in

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.

Passing the peace

Have you felt peaceful over these past few days? Are their people in your network who need to hear a word of Peace? Ring them.
May the Peace of Christ rest with you.

Offering

After so many weeks of restrictions many congregations are now calling upon their reserves to continue ministry:
Bring your offering to this service: may it be blessed to bring hope and peace in this place and beyond.
Be in touch with your congregation's treasurer this week.

Notices

There are 3 Uniting Church places to resource yourself and other from:
Synod of Vic/Tas Home page
<https://victas.uca.org.au>
Gippsland Presbytery Home Page
<https://gippsland.unitingchurch.org.au>
and: if you would like to join in on a version of this shearwater service, Cowes Uniting Church offer "live Stream"
<http://cowes.unitingchurch.org.au/index.php>

Hymn: She came to Jesus

Tune: SLANE - trad. Irish melody (Lord of Creation)

She came to Jesus
from outside the fold -
Canaanite woman!
Persistent and bold!
Looking to Jesus,
she wanted to see
one who would help her
and set her child free.

Claiming a blessing,
a touch of God's grace,
she knew God's love
was not bounded by place.
Jesus, you listened,
debated then healed -
for in her asking,
her faith was revealed.

God, you still bless those
who seek you in prayer.
You welcome dreamers
who faithfully dare.
In Christ, now risen,
your mercy extends,
those on the outside
are welcomed as friends.

Words: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette 2002
Singing the New Testament
Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2008

Blessing

John O'Donohue, Irish Theologian, Poet and Writer reminds us that a Blessing is like a window, a doorway to a path of life before us. Like standing on a shoreline.

May this time of worship
find it's home in your heart.
May it rest in your imaginations;
May it open refreshment in your faith.

In so doing
May the world be made whole
by the life you bring to others
by the service you bring to your
community
by your very presence.
Go with God
Walk with Christ
Be in the Spirit,
This day, and everyday: Amen.

