

Riverside Service
Poplar Grove, Alexandra
20 February 2022



CALL TO WORSHIP

“O Lord, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth!
Your glory is higher than the heavens.”

We gather to praise you!

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...”.

“O Lord, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth!
Your glory is higher than the heavens.”

We gather to celebrate you!

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...”

And God saw that it was good...”

We gather to celebrate our God.

“O Lord, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth!
Your glory is higher than the heavens.”

We gather to worship you!

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...”

And God saw that it was very good...”

We gather to worship our God!

**All praise, honour, majesty and power
belongs to our Creating God! Amen**

Let us take time to be still and listen as we join in the natural worship of God.

....

What did you hear?

HYMN [The Lord's my shepherd](#)

Let us listen to psalm 96:

Praise to God Who Comes in Judgement

- 1 O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous works among all the peoples.
- 4 For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
- 6 Honour and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- 7 Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- 8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
- 9 Worship the Lord in holy splendour;

tremble before him, all the earth.

10 Say among the nations, 'The Lord is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity.'
11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
12 let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
13 before the Lord; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

In this psalm "all the earth" is encouraged to "sing to the Lord," and that it goes on to list a few things in nature that "sing" (or at least make noise!) - can anyone remember what they were? Take a moment to listen to the earth's "sung" worship - get comfortable and stay as still and quiet as you can. Listen carefully to what you can hear - can you identify where all the noises come from? Does it have some sort of rhythm to it?

How do we as humans try to control or hinder the earth's natural worship? What would it look like if all of creation had the opportunity to fully "rejoice before the Lord" (v13a)?

Consider the lillies

"...And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow..."

Matthew 6:28

Matthew 6:28-34

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Reflection

There is a lot that we could be worrying about in our current season. What are some of the things that you worry about?

Share the things you worry about, and then consider how God provides for the flowers.

Tensions with Ukraine and Russia, the rapidly rising numbers of covid cases in New Zealand, the lawlessness displayed in Wellington and around the nation and peoples disregard for any public health measures. Perhaps your worries are more personal, health concerns, your family, challenges at work. One thing I am hearing is from a number of volunteer organisations is the loss of fundraising opportunities currently is really affecting their finances, the local lions club has lost 95% of their funding, the aspiring rotary club has lost near on 100% of the fundraising income. Alexandra golf club has lost a number of large 5 figure fundraising opportunities.

I wonder in what ways do you seek God in your worries and concerns.

The Bible is full of commands about anxiety:

Be anxious for nothing (Philippians 4:6).

Fear not (Isaiah 41:10). This is also commanded 364 other times in scripture, by the way.

Let not your hearts be troubled (John 14:1).

Do not be dismayed (Joshua 1:9).

But knowing scripture and its direction about worry and anxiety is one thing, accepting scripture to an extent that it can overpower worry is quite another thing.

If only we could just pray away our worries, or recite a few scriptures and our lives would be free of concerns, right. In some ways yes. But we need to take these scriptures and then see that they are applied practically to our situation. The first area is probably to address our thinking. To become more aware of the circumstances that trigger your anxiety. You can acknowledge your feelings and make intentional choices to shift your focus to Christ. Acknowledge that God is indeed sufficient to help you and free you from whatever makes you feel anxious.

We need to make room for joy. We need to do things that make us laugh. A joy with Theo is when we crack up laughing together, usually over the simplest of things.

Being thankful is a task that supports our wellbeing. Of acknowledging all the good things in our life and pausing to be thankful, and to acknowledge their source. This often leads our attitude shifting from worry to peace.

Practicing good selfcare is also important. Last weekend I was up at Mt Aspiring, prioritizing physical exercise, proper nutrition, adequate sleep, and connection with other people. Find the activities that give you joy and energy and make time for them without apology. Take care of yourself. And for me connecting with the World that God has created is really important.

Caring for creation is vitally important to our wellbeing, short and long term. Its important on an individual basis and as the church it is also vitally important to us as Christians.

The earth has as much to offer the church as the church has to offer the earth.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). So the Bible begins, with a poetic story of God lovingly shaping a beautiful world, and then filling it with creatures to share it with him.

We learn that it was carefully crafted. Genesis describes God organizing the universe and setting its rhythms in motion: the 24 hour cycle of the day, the month long lunar cycle and our year-long orbit around the sun. The earth is tilted on its axis by 23 degrees, which is why we have seasons. Asaph didn't know that when he wrote Psalm 74, but he was quite right to sing "yours is the day, yours also the night. You established the moon and the sun. You have fixed all the bounds of the earth. You made summer and winter." (Ps 74:15-11)

God made the earth to be shared. After he created the seas and the dry land, God issues a series of invitations. Let the earth produce vegetation, let the water bring forth life. "God who fashioned and made the earth," says Isaiah, "did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited" (Is 45:18). And he got what he asked for: a vibrant, colourful, buzzing world, full of life at every scale, from the tiniest microbes to the mighty blue whale.

Creation was not a one-off event. Genesis tells us that God made the stars, but we know that stars are still being born today, somewhere in the universe. It tells us that God separated the land and the water, but the tectonic plates are still moving, and mountain ranges are still rising. The same is true of living things. When God called life into the seas, the land and the air, he created a dynamic process of evolution that would move towards ever greater beauty and diversity.

Like any work of art, the earth tells us plenty about what its creator is like. God's fingerprints are all over his world. "The skies display his craftsmanship" as David sang in Psalm 19, while Paul argues in Romans (1:20) that God's nature is so evident in his creation that people "have no excuse for not knowing God." If we want to know what God is like, we will find our answers in God's two revelations – the person of Jesus described to us in the Bible, and creation.

So here we have this earth, created with care and made to be shared, an ongoing creation that declares the glory of God. And what does God do with it? He gives it away. As Psalm 115 says, "the heavens belong to the Lord, but he has given the earth to all humanity."

Ultimately, the earth is a gift. God gave it to us as our home. When you think about it, that should be reason enough to take the environment seriously. If the earth is a gift from a loving creator, who made it in lavish diversity, is it okay that so many species are going extinct on our watch? If God shaped the earth so carefully to give us the perfect conditions for life, is it okay that we are changing the atmosphere and warming the planet? Of course not, because that dishonours the gift of creation. Genesis tells us

that the things God made are good, and when we pollute a river or destroy a creature's habitat, we're essentially saying that they are not. We're making our own judgement – this thing is not good, it is worthless.

Environmental destruction is an insult to God's creation, but it's also a really dumb thing to do, because we live here! God gave us the earth as our home, and we all know we should take care of the places where we live. We fix a leaking roof, try to keep our homes clean. It becomes an inconvenience, even a danger, if we don't. The earth as a whole is no different. And it matters that we think about the earth as a whole, because often the environmental damage from our consumer choices falls in faraway places, and on people who contributed little to the problem.

Caring for the earth is pretty common sense really, but perhaps one of the reasons we don't think about it is that we don't actually engage with creation very often. Most of us live indoor lives, and nature is something we go and visit when we feel like it. When we do see it, it's often in contained and domesticated forms, like a city park. If we live in an urban area, it might even feel like nature is deliberately kept at arms' length, concreted over and fenced off. It doesn't surprise us or delight us, or even cross our minds very often. I recently overheard a few mothers talking about childcare centres in Mitre10 Wanaka, and how the children have to wear shoes at all times, because the fake grass at the centre I summer gets too hot and can burn them. So many of us are easily disconnected from the created world, so we forget about it, and the damage that humanity is doing to the environment gets forgotten too.

As we engage with nature, our awareness of the life all around us will grow. We will notice more, open ourselves up to wonder again, and learn to see the world as God sees it. The earth will speak to us about God, and we will spot new ways to "tend and watch over" it, as God asked us to do in Genesis 2. That's where the rest of this book comes in.

The world is intricate and diverse, offering great opportunities to discover its wonders and dive deep into its mysteries. God made it to be shared, so let's explore it together as families, with friends, and with the Creator himself. It's an ongoing creation, which means we don't just get to go and look at it, we get to participate in it. And it points us to God, which is an invitation to seek him in it and praise him for it. And in doing so it will help our worry and restore our souls.

HYMN Be thou my vision

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light
Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son
Thou in me dwelling and I with Thee one

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and Thou only first in my heart
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art
High King of heaven, my victory won
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all

BAPTISM

Preamble

What do you ask of God's Church for Emily?

We ask that she be baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ.

Emily has been brought for baptism that she may be grafted into Christ as a member of his body the Church, to grow up into the faith of Jesus Christ and become his faithful witness and servant.

Scripture

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18-22

Mark tells the story of the baptism of Jesus:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'.
Mark 1:9-11

The Meaning of Baptism

- Baptism is a celebration of God's grace, not of human achievement. It is a means of grace through which God acts to seal the promises of the gospel.
- Baptism is not an end, in itself. It always points beyond itself to celebrate God's grace and covenant faithfulness. At the same time, baptism is not incidental or unimportant to God's people. It should be a celebration fitting to the abundant grace of God offered in Christ.
- Baptism is a sign of a covenant relationship. Our relationship with God in Christ is based on God's promises to us, and baptism conveys these promises to us.
- Baptism is deeply personal but never private. It is a communal action of the gathered congregation, which represents the church in all times and places.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

Anna and Ollie that we may know that you hold the Christian faith and claim your membership in Christ's Church, we ask you:

Do you repent of your sins?

I repent of my sins.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ who has defeated the power of sin and death and brought us new life?

I turn to Christ.

Do you commit yourself to God, trusting in Jesus Christ as Saviour and in the Holy Spirit as God's power and presence along the way?

I commit myself to God.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

In unity with the whole Church, let us stand and affirm the faith into which we were baptised.
Please stand.

Do you believe in God?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (water is poured into font)

God of life, through the breaking of waters and the coming of the Spirit, you bring us new birth; you give the living water, which becomes in us an eternal spring quenching our thirst, flowing through us and refreshing us for eternal life. Washed and cleansed, we are called into service with Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, bless this water, and those to be baptised in it, that they may be born anew, live in your light all their days, and come to share your likeness; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

BAPTISM

Emily, for you Jesus Christ has come, has lived, has suffered; for you he endured the agony of Gethsemane and the darkness of Calvary; for you he uttered the cry, 'It is accomplished!' For you he

triumphed over death; for you he prays at God's right hand; for you, Emily, even before you were born. In baptism, the word of the apostle is confirmed: 'We love, because God first loved us.

Emily, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Emily, from this day on, the sign of the cross is upon you.

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.
Alleluia! Amen.

—from Numbers 6:24-26, NRSV

Emily is now received into the one holy catholic and apostolic Church according to Christ's command.

May the blessing of the three-in-one God be yours.
May the Spirit bless you with hope
poured out like water and flowing as the river.
May Jesus bless you with discomfort
at injustice and oppression.
May the Creator who holds the Earth
as an artist holds brush and palette
fill your imagination
so that you always find the world inspiring and wonderful.
May God in whose being beauty shines on you
journey with you.
God says to you, "you are my beloved,
Be blessed this day and always."

RESPONSES

Anna and Ollie, I ask you now to respond to God's graciousness to Emily by making these solemn promises:

Will you encourage Emily's growth within the Christian community, guiding her through participation in the worship, nurture, and fellowship of the Church to a mature Christian faith?

With God's help, we will.

Will you, by word and example, teach her the way of Christ until the Spirit draws her to make her own response in faith and love?

With God's help, we will

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, will you promise to maintain a life of worship and teaching, witness and service so that Emily may grow to maturity in Christ?

With God's help, we will live out our baptism as a loving community in Christ: nurturing one another in faith, upholding one another in prayer, and encouraging one another in service, until Christ comes.

PRAYERS FOR OUR WORLD

O God You love justice and establish peace on earth.

We bring before you the disunity of today's world: The absurd violence, and the many wars, which are breaking the courage of the people of the world: militarism and armaments race, which are threatening life on the planet: human greed and injustice, which breed hatred and strife.

We pray for the residents of Wellington, the business owners, employees, and people seeking to go about their daily lives, the innocent victims of an illegal occupation, we pray for the police, that their negotiations for peace will bear much fruit. Sadly, we realise that will take much time to resolve. We pray for those who are protesting many seemingly disconnected from reality and with many causes that they

find no resolution. We pray for citizens the world over affected by terror and caught up in political disagreements. We pray for Ukraine that peace may prevail.

Jesus, during Your ministry on Earth You showed Your power and caring by healing people of all ages and stations of life from physical, mental, and spiritual ailments. Be present now to people who need Your loving touch because of COVID-19. May they feel Your power of healing through the care of doctors and nurses.

Take away the fear, anxiety, and feelings of isolation from people receiving treatment or quarantining. Give them a sense of purpose in pursuing health and protecting others from exposure to the disease. Protect their families and friends and bring peace to all who love them.

Father, we seek Your wisdom daily. Be with people making decisions that affect the lives and futures of our families, communities, countries, and the wider world. We pray that they communicate clearly, truthfully, and calmly — with each other and with the public — and that their messages are received and heeded. May truth and empathy be the touchstones of people setting policies for our protection.

Send Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth: Teach us to be compassionate towards the whole human family: Strengthen the will of all those who fight for justice and for peace; lead all nations into the path of peace, and give us that peace which the world cannot give. Amen

CLOSING HYMN Te Aroha

Te Aroha	<i>Love</i>
Te Whakapono	<i>Faith</i>
Me te Rangimārie	<i>Peace</i>
Tātou tatou e	<i>We are one</i>

BENEDICTION AND SENDING

The Lord rules!

He has set the world firmly in place; it won't be shaken.

Let the heaven celebrate!

Let the earth rejoice!

Let the sea and everything in it roar!

Let the countryside and everything in it celebrate!

Let the trees of the forest shout with joy!

For the Lord is coming.

**He is coming to set the world right,
and to establish justice among the people.**