



Southside Worship Online

11 April 2021

To prepare yourself to worship, you are invited to spend a few minutes settling yourself into a comfortable space. Close your eyes. Slow your breathing. Become aware of what you can feel in and around your body – what you can hear, or feel, or smell. Acknowledge the distractions around and within you and bring them with you into worship. You may like to light a candle to help centre your thoughts toward the love and presence of the living God.

Call to worship

We come to God through Christ, redeemed by Christ's blood, shed on our behalf.

He has been raised from death and is glorified: through Christ, we come to God. Amen.

Song *Immortal, Invisible*

Prayer of Confession

Lord, as we travel the journey of life,
sometimes we are sad and discouraged,
and don't recognise your presence.
Forgive us and help us, loving God.

As we travel through new experiences,
sometimes we are confused and afraid,
and forget to look for you amongst the unfamiliar.
Forgive us and help us, loving God.

As we meet new people,
some who have different ideas and views from our own,
some who challenge and make us feel uncomfortable,
we fail to see you at work in them.
Forgive us and help us, loving God.

As we listen to old familiar Bible stories,
sometimes we neglect to look for new opportunities
among the well-known words.
Forgive us and help us, loving God.

As we share food at your table,
eating bread as a symbol of Jesus' body,
drinking wine as a sign of his blood,
we do not go out with joy in our hearts.
Forgive us and help us, loving God.

When we have opportunities to share good news,
we gossip and discourage.
When we have new ways of service before us,
we waste time and make up excuses.
Forgive us and help us, loving God.

When we come before our Lord
and confess our sin,
God forgives us.
We hear then God's word of grace,
our sins are forgiven.
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Sermon**Prayers of thanksgiving**

The disciples didn't know it was Jesus on the road with them. Think about a time when you had not realised Jesus was at work in your life until much later. Thank God for all the times you have realised that he was walking alongside you, even when you doubted. In response to God's presence, offer your prayers of thanksgiving and dedicate your monetary offering to him.

Prayers of intercession

God of invitation, we thank you for your presence in our lives.

We pray that you would give us open doors and open hearts, sharing hospitality in your name.

We pray for those who have been rejected or made unwelcome, those who struggle to fit in, those who do not know what it is to be loved. Show them your love, dear Lord, and help us to be carriers of your compassion.

We thank you for those who have been our welcomers, those who make such a difference in ways seen or unseen, those ready to give, to share, who stretch out their arms to

those in need. Bless and strengthen them; and help us to show our gratitude and support.

We pray for those in power and authority, that they would see what needs doing to help the poorest and most vulnerable – and act on it, that the world may become a kinder and fairer place.

We pray that as you walk beside us, we would draw strength from you, and grow in knowledge of you, that our hearts too might burn within us.

We pray all these things in the powerful name of Jesus.

Amen.

Song

In Christ alone

Benediction

God of glory, go before us.

Walk with us.

Remind us of the profound reality
of a life infused with your love.

Let us be witnesses to you,

whatever roads we travel,

sharing the good news

and celebrating the enduring hope we have.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

What are you talking about?

Luke 24:13 – 35

Words matter, don't they? What we say about ourselves and the situations that we are in define how we respond. My mother has a habit of speaking of days like last Monday, when it was wet, overcast and cold as being "bleak". And of course, that affects her mood, she becomes bleak.

Today's passage would not make a great movie. There's hardly any action, all the drama is found in the conversation between Jesus and the 2 disciples.

Jesus meets them on this journey and asks them "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

Who's ever asked that question before? You join a group of friends, you walk into a room filled with your family, you overhear your spouse on the phone "What are you talking about?" It's a question that indicates that we want to be part of what is going on.

And we find that Cleopas and his companion are discussing the news, specifically, political news. Jesus has just been crucified, and in the Roman Empire, crucifixion was deeply political.

But no conversation is ever value neutral. Their conversation took on a particular tone, as they walked. A tone of defeat and failure. Cleopas declares in the past tense, "We had hoped Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel" (24:21). They have heard that Jesus' tomb is empty (24:22-23), but they do not believe it.

Jesus asked a question designed to engage the men in conversation, but Cleopas' reply reveals a delightful paradox for the reader: "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" (24:18). Of course, if anyone understood what had happened, it was Jesus! They did not believe Jesus had risen from the dead, so they were left with three faulty perspectives.

First, their viewpoint lacked a spiritual dimension, leaving them with a human understanding of the events. Take note of how Cleopas characterised the death of Jesus. For them this was all the work of men. There is nothing of the divine prophecy that this must happen to the Messiah.

Second, their own agenda determined their expectations. Many disciples made the mistake of thinking that the Messiah would merely recapture the glory days of King David. In other words, they hoped Jesus would bring Israel the same power and prosperity she once enjoyed, only magnified and multiplied. Given their exclusive worship of God, this would not be an inappropriate wish. But compared to the reality that lay before them—Roman oppression and a dead Messiah—their hopes for glory seemed to have been utterly destroyed.

Third, they failed to acknowledge the resurrection. If these two followers believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, two things would have been true. First, they would have been walking toward Jerusalem to see the risen Lord, not away. Second, they would have seen the trials, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus as the fulfillment of all he promised, not as the end of their hopes.

And with this attitude it's no wonder that they can't recognise Jesus. We're told that "their eyes were kept from recognising him" (verse 16). Is it this attitude that keeps them from recognising him?

The disciples were kept from recognising, what if the disciples cannot recognise Jesus because their opinions are already fully formed? Like all humans, their assumptions shape what they talk about, and what they talk about shapes what they see. And for Cleopas and his companion, the danger of their negative talk is that it confirms their bias and in doing so leads them to miss seeing Jesus altogether.

Jesus' question, "What are you discussing?" pushes us to pause and pay attention to the stories that we are telling and to the fact that what we discuss shapes what we can and cannot see. Do the things we discuss amongst ourselves (and the assumptions we make when we talk) lead us toward Jesus? Toward wholeness? Away from bitterness? Conversely: what are we not discussing? To what and to whom are we not paying attention, and in our neglect or ignorance, devaluing other travellers on this shared journey?

And do we speak in a form of defeatism when it comes to the future of the church? I think for many followers of Jesus in the past 60 or 70 years we have given into a type of talk that says Christianity is dying out. That young people are not interested in our faith. We talk about the society that we live in being antagonistic to the church.

And that might be part of the story. But it's not the whole story.

2 weeks ago I received an invitation from the Yeronga RSL inviting Southside to be part of the ANZAC day parade. In a community celebration that will include members of the armed services, Australian Defence Force, community groups, schools, scouts and guides and of course members of the public, the organisers affirmed a particular part for the church.

What's more interesting is some research that was released last weekend about attitudes in Australia to matters of spirituality, life after death, a soul and ghosts. Amongst a number of questions, respondents were asked for their view this Easter on the claim that Jesus Christ rose from the dead: 23.6 per cent said they are certain this happened; 15.8 per cent are certain it didn't. Others thought it possible (19.7 per cent) or unlikely (12.8 per cent). But the most popular answer, at 28.3 per cent, was "I don't know".

How do these figures affect your conversation? What if we talked about the potential to see these 30% of people move from "I don't know", to "it's possible" or "it happened". Rather than talking of decline, we could be talking about growth. We could be living with anticipation and expectation to see God at work in people's lives.

What about our conversation has a spiritual dimension? Our church council has introduced a new item to our monthly agenda. We will be starting each meeting with personal sharing about where we've seen God in our lives. Our Yeronga community includes this in their worship services. What if we included this type of question in our conversations with each other? It reminds us and encourages us that God continues to work miracles, to be transformation and is present in our daily living.

How can our conversation change our expectations of what we experience? What if we talked with each other about what excites us about church? I know that there can be things that drag, bore and frustrate us about church. So and So sings out of tune too loud, the sermon was too long, I had to park too far away, the music was too loud, the person praying was too quiet. Instead of dwelling on the negative, what if we talked about the inspiration we found in prayer, the new gem of insight we found in the words of a song, the gracious comments of a friend. When we speak like this, then others may think that our church is something that they might want to belong to.

In your conversation can you speak of the hope of resurrection life for our church and the people you know and love? We can pray with hope and expectation that the message of Jesus can become real to them. We can speak with confidence that what we have to say is of interest and meaning. We can make invitations to experience more of our church life with the expectation that those we invite may say yes.

There is power in words. As Jesus walked along with the disciples "he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." It was these words that transformed the attitude of the disciples so that when the bread was broken, they could see the reality of the risen Christ.

Our language, both to each other and to those who are not yet followers of Jesus, has the power to allow us to see the ongoing revelation of Jesus in this world. Amen.