

Call to Worship

Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. (Ps 25:4-5)

Worship in song

Sing hymns and/or worship songs of your choice.

Reading from the Psalms (if required)

Psalms 15

Prayer of confession

Lord, as we gather today to give you glory and rejoice in your love, Your Spirit compels us to examine ourselves before you.

We confess that we have been poor ambassadors of your glory.

Your church has wounded too many. We have abused trust, abused love and abused truth. People have looked to us for hope but we can't agree on what is true. We have exalted our own opinions over your principles in Scripture. We have embraced the world's culture and been ashamed of the gospel rather than embrace the gospel and shared it with the world. We have multiplied our institutions but divided the church. We have chosen status rather than mission. Routines have replaced authentic worship. We have lusted after prestige rather than a servant heart. We have chosen methods of manipulation rather than integrity. Leaders have dishonoured their people and people have dishonoured their leaders.

Lord, forgive us.

This day, we choose to do things your way. Renew us by your Spirit so that we may live the gospel of Jesus in a way that is powerful and which delights you. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Pet 3:18)

Prayer of thanksgiving

We thank you, our God for you are gracious.

You have loved us from the beginning of time. You have wooed us with your love. You draw close in times of trouble.

And so we proclaim: *Your mercy endures forever.*

We thank you, our God for Jesus our Saviour; who shared our life of pain; who rescues us into an eternal future; who invites us to follow him in mission.

And so we proclaim: *Your mercy endures forever.*

We thank you, our God for you sent your Holy Spirit, to comfort us; to lead us into truth; to empower us in our mission.

And so we proclaim: *Your mercy endures forever.*

Holy Communion

On an evening, two thousand years ago, we hear the tale of two cups. The first was a cup of wine. In ancient Greek, Roman and even Chinese cultures, it was the practice to pour out a libation of wine as an offering to their pagan gods. But on this night, a man who was God, took wine and gave it to his friends. Jesus took the cup, identified the wine in it with the blood that he would shortly shed to pay for the price of your sins and mine, and said, "This is the cup of my blood, drink this all of you." Jesus wanted everyone to share in his sacrifice on their behalf and have their sins blotted out. This was the first cup

The second cup Jesus drank that evening was the cup of suffering (mentioned in every gospel). In Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospel, Jesus prays to his Heavenly Father in the Garden of Gethsemane to take the cup of suffering from him, but then says he is prepared to drink it if it is the Father's will (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42). In John's gospel he simply says, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (Jn 18:11). So let's pray:

Lord Jesus,

we cannot imagine the anguish of your soul caused by you taking our sins upon you.

You who knew no sin, willingly took the vile abuse meted out by predators of our children.

Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup.

You who knew no sin, willingly took the degradation and self-obsessed escapism of the addict.

Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup.

You who knew no sin, willingly took the pleasure addicted selfishness of the careless.

Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup.

You who knew no sin, took the avarice of the greedy and their destruction of the poor.

Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup.

You who knew no sin, willingly took the evil of those who delight in cruelty.

Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup.

You who knew no sin, willingly took the malicious arrogance of those who curse God.

Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup.

Lord Jesus, we are so grateful that you drank the cup of God's wrath on our behalf.

We are humbled and amazed at the extent of your love for us.

Thank you, Lord Jesus.

The Bible Reading

Romans 8:5-9

The Message: BE TRANSFORMED

If you have the privilege of living in a village in Vanuatu for a good length of time, there is a good chance that you will see the extraordinary effect of God's Holy Spirit on a community. Worship meetings by people sitting on woven coconut-leaf mats; the community gathering to sing gospel songs of blessings to a particular family each evening in January; children laughing, yelling and singing gospel songs all day... You will see the effect of God's Holy Spirit on a tiny, poor nation that sociologists have described as "the happiest people on Earth".

This may cause you to reflect on the wonderful transformative stories people tell of what happens when they and their families commit their lives to Christ. Hearing them can cause a deep ache in your soul, and perhaps a deep grief.

If only the world could see the transforming affect of God in the lives of people today, there would be no question in anyone's mind about the goodness of God and the goodness of his church. Sadly, the reality in Australia (egged on by an atheistic-dominated media) is an impression that the church is bad for people. It has been responsible for terrible abuses, and attempts to then keep these abuses secret.

Just think what it would be like if the people of Australia see authentic Christians who have been transformed by God. Jesus tells us, *Let your light shine before all people that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven* (Mt 5:16). Some wonderful testimonies of communities being transformed by God exist. One of them is what happened in the Welsh revival of 1904-5. Another is what occurred in the revival that broke out amongst the Aboriginal communities in northern Australia in the 1970s.

Some might object and say that people don't have to be a Christian in order to be good. They are quite right. But you do need to be a Christian in order to be transformed and anchored in truth. This leads me to talk about the work of God's Holy Spirit in your life and mine.

One of the Holy Spirit's roles is to live within you and to transform your character – with your co-operation, so that it becomes like Christ's. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to transform your character so that you exhibit the fruit of the Spirit living within you, i.e. to demonstrate: *love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* (Gal 5:22-23).

The Bible says that we are, *predestined to be conformed to the image of* (Jesus) (Rom 8:29). 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that *we are being transformed into* (Christ's) *likeness*. And Paul speaks in Ephesians of us becoming *mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13).

Wow! That's amazing.

Now here is something which is deeply disturbing and very confronting. Whilst the apostle Paul appreciated that none of us can be perfect this side of heaven, he nonetheless expected to see two things:

- 1) evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of those claiming to be Christians. If Paul didn't see evidence of the Holy Spirit transforming people's character he said that they were not Christians
- 2) no evidence of the Holy Spirit empowering people's ministry. If he didn't see this, he would ask them if they knew about the Holy Spirit and had prayed to be empowered by him.

In other words, if Paul didn't see a community that was so good and so Christ-like that people noticed, he would say that they were not authentic Christians.

According to Paul, if our minds were not submitted to God and being transformed by God's Holy Spirit, then God was not present within you. This meant that you were not realizing your purpose in life, and no one is seeing the transforming power of God in your lives.

Wow!

Let me tell you the story of Simon Magus in Acts 8:9-23. Simon, the magician, had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, had believed it, and had been baptized as a result of Philip's ministry in Samaria. Simon had fulfilled all the requirements of a faithful, evangelical church... and yet Peter and John, (who had come up to help Philip's ministry) could see that his character had not changed at all. Simon was full of pride, ego and wanted power for himself so he could continue to be a spiritual "big-shot". Peter then says some pretty tough words to Simon. He says, *you have no share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God ... Repent ... for I see that you are full of bitterness and are captive to sin* (Acts 8:21-23). In other words, Simon had not allowed the Holy Spirit of God to transform his character.

Later on in Acts chapter 19:1-7, Paul is in Ephesus and he could see no evidence of the empowering presence of God's Holy Spirit amongst the believers there, and so he asks them, *"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit"* (Acts 19:2). Paul then prays for them and they experience God's supernatural presence amongst them (just like the wonderful indigenous Australians I have been listening to) and they prophesy and speak in tongues (Acts 19:6).

Quite simply, we must show evidence of the God's Holy Spirit working in our lives. This is what Jesus insisted must happen when he spoke with Nicodemus who visited him at night to question him. Jesus made it plain to him that he had to be born again of God's Spirit.

You see: God's Holy Spirit takes the gospel from the mind to the heart. The Holy Spirit moves the gospel from information to transformation. The Holy Spirit makes the gospel "live" and become "real" in your life to such an extent, that people notice.

In Romans 12:2, Paul writes: *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

God offers to break us free from whatever has been sucking the life out of us... and to transform us. He is offering us the Holy Spirit to transform and empower us.

Is now the time you need to repent and surrender to God's love and purposes for your life. If so, ask him to fill you afresh, or for the first time, with his Holy Spirit so that you grow the character of Christ and have a God-empowered ministry.

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

Go in peace to seek God's love; know God's power; live God's purpose, and enjoy God's future,

Amen.

This service was provided by Nick Hawkes for HopeNet SA

You are God's temple

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Show the children where this teaching is in the Bible (1 Cor 3:16-17), i.e. in the New Testament, after the stories about Jesus in the letters written by Paul, the man who travelled about starting the first Christian churches.

Temples are places where a god (or gods) are said to live.

Show some pictures of temples. (Easily done via a web search.)

Go on to teach that the one true God is:

- 1) loving
- 2) is holy
- 3) is everywhere around us
- 4) is invisible to us now (but will not be invisible to us later in heaven)

Ask: If God is invisible, what sort of special temple can we worship him in?

Say that you are going to show them the most amazing, special, sacred temple God loves to be worshipped in, loved in and spoken to in. Build up a sense of curiosity and expectation. Ask which child wants to be the first to see it. Take them aside and hold up before them a mirror.

Dealing with the outbursts that follow should be fun.

Tell them that God's favourite place to be worshipped and loved is within them, within their hearts and minds (prayer) and within the things they do and say.

If you have time for an activity, invite them to draw a frame around a piece of silver foil stuck on a paper (a mirror) and label it, "God's favourite temple ...is me".