

Call to Worship

Why am I here Lord? What's the purpose of my being here, where I am, at this moment?
What do you want me to do?

I am God's handiwork. I am created, in Christ Jesus, so I can do those good things which
God has prepared for me to do. (From Ephesians 2:10)

Prayer

Father, sometimes I lose my way. Sometimes I can't see what I'm here for. Sometimes I
take my eyes off you and chase after those things that end up bringing me despair, robbing
me of my joy, and damaging my hope. Refresh my spirit as I read your word and speak
from my heart to you. I am your handiwork. You have good things for me to do – people
to love, people to serve as I serve you. Fill me anew with your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Song: "What the Lord has Done in Me" (by Reuben Morgan)

1. Let the weak say, "I am strong", let the poor say, "I am rich",
Let the blind say, "I can see". It's what the Lord has done in me. (Repeat)
Hosanna, Hosanna, to the lamb that was slain.
Hosanna, Hosanna, to the lamb that was slain
2. Into the river I will wade, and there my sins are washed away.
From the heavens mercy streams of the Saviour's love for me
3. And I will rise from waters deep, into the saving arms of God,
And I will sing salvation songs – Jesus Christ has set me free!
4. Let the weak say, "I am strong", let the poor say, "I am rich",
Let the blind say, "I can see". It's what the Lord has done in me.

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Prayer of Intercession

Lord, I offer a prayer of thanksgiving for Barnabas Aid and the world-wide work it does for
Christians who are disadvantaged and persecuted for their faith in you. Thank you for the
vision and work of Patrick Sookhdeo in founding the organisation. Thank you for those
who now lead Barnabas Aid, and I pray particularly for the Australian Board as they
negotiate big changes in the governance of the organisation – I pray for passion, hope and
energy as they continue this work. Thank you too for our own Rev Ian Clarkson who has
had a significant role of leadership in recent times and bless him as he moves on from that
role.

Thank you for Barnabas Aid's financial, leadership, and training support for Christians in so
many places:

- For ministry in Cambodian prisons
- For funding sustainable farms and vocational skills in Laos

What's in your Sheet?

- For providing Bibles to support pastors and churches in Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand.
- For funding the restoration of farmlands devastated by Islamist violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- For the Bible training for Muslim background converts in Uganda.

I pray with every Christian brother and sister whose faith is tested by persecution. Give them hope in their salvation through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus. Amen

Bible Reading:

- Acts 11:4-18

Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance, I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up Peter. Kill and eat.' I replied, 'Surely not Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean'. This happened three times, and it was all pulled up to heaven again.

Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. So, if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way.

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Song: AHB 477 "God of all Power" (by Charles Wesley)

1. God of all power, and truth, and grace, which shall from age to age endure,
Whose word when heaven and earth shall pass, remains and stands for ever sure;
2. That I your mercy may proclaim, that all mankind your truth may see,
Hallow your great and glorious name, and perfect holiness in me.
3. Purge me from every evil blot; my idols all be cast aside;
Cleanse me from every sinful thought, from all the filth of self and pride.
4. Give me a new, a perfect heart, from sorrow free, and doubt and fear;
The mind which was in Christ impart, and let my spirit know you near.

What's in your Sheet?

5. O that I now, from sin released, your word to the utmost prove,
Enter into the promised rest, the Canaan of your perfect love.

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Message: "What's in your Sheet"

Recently in my English language class, I asked them what foods they loved and even craved, and what foods they had eaten. Regardless of national background, chocolate was rated very highly, and one lady from Vietnam said durian was her passion. Another came from a small, poor village in China and said that it was common to eat rats and mice, cats and dogs, and even monkeys. She made a particular point that her Dad bred dogs - not for pets, but for food! And I was able to share about the time that I cooked and ate a python when I lived in Thailand. There was a particular horror about cats and monkeys, and I guess most of us would baulk at the others as well. I mean, it's not "right", is it? It's OK to eat lamb and beef and chicken and pork and shellfish, but the other stuff doesn't seem "right". But Hindus in some regions would be horrified about the beef, and the Jews similarly disturbed about pork and shellfish. Different cultures, different tastes, different rules. Sometimes we are so used to something it's hard to accept something different.

Let's go back to Acts. Peter faced the same dilemma. For all his life he had an understanding of Jewish traditions about food. It was cemented in his thinking to the point it was more than a rule; it was "right". And then in a vision God lowers a sheet with animals, birds and reptiles and tells Peter to kill and eat - 3 times. Horror! Maybe a bit like us being asked to eat a cat. But God was trying to teach Peter something more important than food. Peter probably never changed his eating habits and never had a pork chop with apple sauce, or a prawn cocktail for the rest of his life. It wasn't about that. God had his plan and his purposes.

In this passage it would have been only months since Jesus had died, was raised, and the Holy Spirit given. In Jesus, God has declared what his plan is. John 3:16. **For God so loved the world he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.** And Matthew 28:19 - 20. **Therefore, go 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 I have commanded you.**

God has already chosen the person to lead this outreach into the world of the Gentiles. Saul, already renamed Paul, was being prepared right at this time. But there, standing in the way of this great mission, blocking the purposes of Almighty God, is the new hero of the fledgling church, Peter. The same Peter who preached the first sermon about the risen Lord and saw thousands converted. The same Peter who was arrested for preaching too much and was miraculously broken out of gaol by an angel. The same Peter who in the power of the Holy Spirit said to the begging cripple, "Silver and gold have I none, but in the name of Jesus, get up and walk."

This same Peter was a bit of a stumbling block to the fulfilment of the purposes of God for the whole world. Paul couldn't really go ahead with what he was called to do without the support of the church leadership, and the most important leader was

What's in your Sheet?

Peter, who hadn't really grasped the plan for the gospel to go to the Gentiles. So, God met him on that rooftop to teach him a lesson, and he immediately obeyed by going to the Roman Cornelius's house, preaching there, and baptising a household full of Gentiles. Explaining this to the other leaders opened the way to the gospel being preached right across the Mediterranean and ultimately right across the world.

Now the same God who had a plan for the early church has a plan for my church and your church, and that plan is really no different to what we've already read in John 3 (that's why we are redeemed) and Matthew 28 (that's why we should be having an impact in our communities and in our world). So now the big question. What is God lowering in my, and your sheet? What shift in thinking is required? What am I hanging on to that could prevent me from being part of what God is doing in my church? What tradition or habits have I elevated to become a non-negotiable?

God has had to deal with me on a number of issues over the years (and still needs to!). There have been a few things in my sheet. Roman Catholicism for one. My 1950s and 60s evangelical upbringing meant that I once believed that Roman Catholics could not be born again Christians. Then God lowered my sheet. I saw Roman Catholics who were filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and had a heart for evangelism!

So, what's in your sheet? Was the last full stop in good hymn writing put there in 1900? Should the kids stay in church for the service or go out to Sunday school? Small pieces of bread, larger pieces of bread, or wafers for Holy Communion? Should someone else sit in my pew or chair? Should communion be served to non-members?

I'm not talking about core beliefs here. Things like, Jesus is the Son of God and saves us from sin. The cross and the resurrection are central to our lives and beliefs. Scripture is the word of God. We are called to evangelise. God created us males and females and placed us in families. No, I'm talking about the stuff of habit and tradition, maybe the way we decided over the years to do things as a church that enhanced our call to be God's people and share the gospel with others. These things may still be good things, but what is God's plan for your church today. Isaiah 43 tells us not to dwell in the past, "See, I am doing a new thing." Ask God what new thing he has for you and your church. For some small churches, outreach programmes or starting a youth group may be an impossible task because of numbers and resources. But what fresh revelation is he giving you in your life. What is he doing anew to enrich the relationships and fellowship of your church. What can those in your community see in what you do and say that speaks the gospel of Jesus? When Jesus prayed for his disciples (including us), he prayed that we would be united as Jesus is with his Father. **"Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them, even as you have loved me."** (John 17:23). Is that visible in your life and your church?

When Peter in his vision saw the sheet come down three times, he said, "I can't!" "Never!" "Surely not Lord!" But when the knock on the door came, he went, and God's mission for the fledgling church began. "Help us Lord, to put aside our reluctance to change our thinking and be open to what you want me and my church to do so that we can go into the world and make disciples. Amen"

What's in your Sheet?

Song: "Make me a Channel of your Peace" (Jon Cohen)

1. Make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord, and where there is doubt true faith in you.
2. Make me a channel of your peace, where there is despair in life let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, only light, and where there's sadness only joy.
*Oh, Master grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul.*
3. Make me a channel of your peace, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in giving to all men that we receive, and in dying that we are born to eternal life.
4. Make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord, and where there's doubt true faith in you.

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Benediction

May the Lord, stir up his gifts in you so you can obey the command to love others and to share the gospel of reconciliation with them. May you be set free from anything that hinders you from walking in the will of God. And may God strengthen you through the grace of the Lord Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA