



PCNUC worship
order of service
Epiphany 2C
January 16, 2022
9am



Welcome and Introduction: *Rhonda*

This biblical texts for the second Sunday in the season of Epiphany bring to our attention our response to the good news proclaimed by the birth of Jesus.

In the Hebrew scriptures a word of hope and an urging to celebrate to a forlorn and dispirited community.

Likewise in the New Testament, hope and celebration that finds a place, not in a denial of hardship or dismay but in the utter dependability of the life-giving presence of God with all creation.

So, as we enter into a time and space of worship, as we light the Christ candle and allow the light to reveal that which is hidden, let us pause, take a breath and be ready to receive an encouragement, even an imperative to celebrate that we are indeed the beloved, the ones whom God delights in, the ones in whom God's Spirit is shown. Let us hear and respond to this word even in our own times of dismay, uncertainty and frustration.

Call to Worship: *Rhonda*

From the words of the psalmist,

“How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.”
Let us worship God.

Acknowledgment of Country: *Rhonda*

We acknowledge the Burrumattagal people of the Darug Nation, the first inhabitants and the traditional custodians of the land which our congregations usually meet. We pay our respects to their ancient culture, their elders past and present and their emerging leaders. We acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside within this area. We honour them for their custodianship of the land, on which we gather today.

Prayer of Adoration: *Ian and Margie*

(based on Psalm 36 – by Howard Wallace 2013)

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.
How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.
O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!

Prayer of Reconciliation: *Rhonda*

God of all creation,

As we listen to the words of scripture today some of us will find it hard to receive – we have been so conditioned by negativity, so conditioned to look for fault and so willing to engage in complaining that it's almost impossible for us to hear the words of the prophet Isaiah, “that you delight in us” and to receive them as so.

We have been so conditioned to focus on our faults and failings, that we cannot hear the words of Paul “that the Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all,” and to accept that this is about us.

We have been so conditioned to align success with faithfulness, that when things go wrong, we miss the opportunities to be led into new ways, along new paths, and to celebrate your presence. Instead, we blame ourselves and others for lack of faith.

As we hear your words today – let us receive your delight in us, let us see your spirit in one another and let us find your ways of celebrating and bringing joy to the world. Because we are praying in the name of the one who makes it so. Amen

Scripture Readings: *Ian and Margie*

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

John 2:1-11

Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother said to him, “They are out of wine.”

⁴ “You must not tell me what to do,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

⁵ Jesus' mother then told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ The Jews have rules about ritual washing, and for this purpose six stone water jars were there, each one large enough to hold between twenty and thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill these jars with water.” They filled them to the brim, ⁸ and then he told them, “Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast.” They took him the water, ⁹ which now had turned into wine, and he tasted it. He did not know where this wine had come from (but, of course, the servants who had drawn out the water knew); so he called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!”

¹¹ Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Reflection – Do we need to learn how to party?

What was John thinking when he chose this story of Jesus turning water into wine as the defining moment for the followers to find belief?

Matthew and Mark have Jesus beginning with Preaching, Luke has Jesus beginning with teaching but not John. In John's gospel, Jesus has followers because John the Baptist has told them that Jesus was the Messiah – he has not preached or taught or healed anyone, they are following Jesus simply on John's testimony. There's a curious exchange between Jesus and his mother where it appears that it is Mary who has decided it was time for Jesus to reveal himself. (Revelation is an important theme for John). Jesus on the other hand is not so keen and yet he does what Mary seems to know he can. I love it. I love everything about this story and I love that John is revealing his own understanding of the good news right from the beginning. Later on in John's gospel we will hear Jesus say, "I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness."

I spent my teenage years in the church hearing multiple sermons about the evils of "the drink" and this passage was particularly challenging to those preachers. One even went so far as to tell us that "it wasn't really alcoholic wine just very good grape juice." I didn't buy that then and I don't buy it now. To be distracted by such concerns is, I think, to miss the point.

Early in my ministry I wrote a bible study called "Jesus the Party Animal" for our group of young adults. It was deliberately a provocative title but actually simply an exploration of how Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels as opposed to how he is presented in popular theology. It was my reaction to discovering that Jesus didn't shy away from parties, feasts and gatherings, that he wasn't the insipid, serious almost morbid character of the movies, but actually someone that people wanted to invite to dinner, someone that people wanted to be around, someone who was genuinely fun to be with. As I re-read the gospel stories with this picture of Jesus, I actually caught a glimpse of the good news about experiencing the fullness of life.

I think John is being deliberately provocative by beginning Jesus's ministry with the miracle of water into wine. It's a story of generosity, it's a story of hospitality and community, it's a story of people celebrating well enabled by the work of Jesus.

I wonder what was happening in John's community that he felt the need to shape the good news of Jesus so clearly around the fullness of life? Had persecution and the threat of being betrayed dampened their joy, had theological conflict around the separation of flesh and spirit made it difficult to enjoy each other's company? Was there something else, or a number of things happening that was stopping them from being communities that others would want to belong to?

For me this story along with the other readings set for today invites me to consider are we creating communities that live out the good news of the fullness of life? Is fun or frivolity ever something we link with the church, or something we do in our other lives? I really don't know what John's community was experiencing but I know what we are experiencing, and it's really tough, so I think we need to hear his Gospel from our own context of uncertainty, from our own experiences of feeling flat, despondent and a little bit lost. Now is the time for us to be owning and embracing that we are beloved. Now is the time for us to be owning and embracing that God's Spirit gifts each of us for the benefit of all. Now is the time for us to be working out how we develop communities that can celebrate God's love, that can encourage life lived in all its fullness and communities that point others to this life lived God's way.

Covid is forcing us all to think about what is important and to find safe ways to do that. Families are doing things differently. Workplaces are organising themselves more safely. It's difficult but it's also creative. As a church, we can't do what we used to do – we can't meet in large gatherings, or sing communally or do most of the things that we used to do. But that's ok, for the most part it wasn't really working anyway, other than keeping us busy This is our opportunity to find new ways to share the good news of life God's way to a world that is despairing and struggling for meaning and connection.

It's an opportunity to find a new way to party, or at least to laugh and enjoy what really matters in life. I'm not meaning that we contrive a false happiness, or that we cannot be sad or dismayed but we cannot stay there for long when we embrace God's presence.

The other day I took the funeral of an older member of a past congregation. It had been many years since I had had contact with the family, but as I sat with them and listened as they shared stories of their dad and pa, we laughed.

When I left that house, I felt good and I realised that it had been a long time since I had shared laughter like that – how ironic that it would be in the context of grief and loss and then I read the story of Jesus getting the party going. Perhaps this is what the Spirit's presence in our lives is all about?

What gifts has the Spirit given each of us that we might share with our neighbours for the benefit of all? If we can't meet in large groups, can we meet in small ones? If we can't sing communally, can we find other ways to lift our spirits? If we can't share food like we used to, can we find other ways to be generous and hospitable?

For me it starts with recovering what is important in the Gospel, how does Jesus bring new life? Then how do we celebrate that in ways that are not only safe but also attractive?

The struggles are real, the grief and loss are real, which makes it all the more important for us to figure out how we support one another in the struggle and find ways to experience the fullness of life because it's why Jesus is with us. Amen.

Offering: *Rhonda*

as God's Spirit is present in some way in each of us – let us consider how that might inform the offering that we bring for the work of God's kingdom.

Prayers of the People: *Ian and Margie*

Now as your beloved people in whom your Spirit dwells, we bring our prayers for our world, our communities and those for whom we are concerned.

We despair at the grief and loss caused by the Covid-19 variants and we need your help to find our way as people of hope, peace, love and joy. So, show us how to be generous, hospitable, welcoming and life giving in a world where how we have done these things is no longer safe.

Our prayers are for health workers, nurses, paramedics and doctors who are feeling the strain of too much need and not enough resources ... solutions are not simple but if there are ways that we can help them in their time of need ... show us.....

Our prayers are for teachers finding preparation for the school year uncertain, experiencing unrealistic demands and buckling under their concern for marginal and disadvantaged students ... if there are ways that we can help them in their time of need.. show us

Our prayers are for leaders, political, business and church leaders, navigating unknown territory, needing to redefine success and identify and understand conflicting agendas, motivations and expectations all the while making decisions that threaten the life, livelihood and mental health of manyif there are ways that we can help them in their time of need .. show us

Accepting that these circumstances are not going away anytime soon, help us to find ways to celebrate the joy of being your beloved, the peace of knowing that you are with us, the power of love that we see in one another and the hope that is eternal in your promise to the world.

If we need to learn to laugh again, to have fun and to build one another up Teach us.

Many before us have shone in times of hardship and despair, may we learn from them, may we see the Spirit's presence in each person for the good of all and may your Spirit in us inspire others to joyfulness. Amen.

Song: Joy to the World

(Isaac Watts 1634-1738, Public Domain)

1. Joy to the world the Lord is come
let earth receive her King
let every heart prepare him room
and heaven and nature sing
and heaven and nature sing
and heaven and heaven and nature sing.

2. Joy to the earth - the Saviour reigns!
let all their songs employ
while fields and floods rocks hills and plains repeat the sounding joy
repeat the sounding joy
repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

3. He rules the world with truth and grace
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love
and wonders of his love
and wonders, wonders of his love.

Word of mission: *Rhonda*

Look up, look out, look around
God calls us to be people of joy for the good of all
Find ways to be these people.

Blessing: *Rhonda*

The blessing of the One who delights in us
The blessing of the One who walks with us
The blessing of the One who indwells and equips us
Be your reality today and always. Amen.