

PAPER CHURCH

A New Imagination for Church – Acts 2:41-47

2 August 2020

Some Tips

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

Get prepared for worship

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'sacred' space

When we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), it is important to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship.

Be intentional. Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden). Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image). Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.

Call to Worship

Nigel Mann

Isaiah 43: 1-2, 18-19

In Isaiah's time the Hebrew people felt isolated and afraid, but he believed they were on a threshold of something new. Through the prophet the Lord said to his people:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you

...

Do not remember the former things,

or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;

now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?



Song: Novum

Jess and Daniel Hammond

Wake up you who are sleeping
There is life that brings healing
It's time for you to rise again
Call forth light from the darkness
Call out life from the ashes
It's time for you to live again
And the days of yesterday are gone
Don't look back don't hold back

Shine shine your light
Greater things than this are still to come

Lift up hands that are weary
Sing out hearts that are heavy
There is a new song to be sung
Hold out hope in the darkness
Hold on hold to the promise
Take heart see your God has come
And the days of yesterday are gone
Don't look back don't hold back

Shine shine your light
Greater things than this are still to come
Shine shine your light
Greater things than this are still to come

You make all things
You make all things new
You make all things
You make all things new

Shine shine your light
Shine shine your light

CCLI Song # 7006769
Daniel Hammond | Jessie Hammond
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Prayer of Praise

God of all glory on the first day you began creation, bringing light out of darkness.

On a new first day you began your new creation, raising Jesus Christ out of the darkness of death.

And on this new day may we, the people you create by water and Spirit, be joined with all your works in praising you for your great glory.

Through Jesus Christ, in union with your Spirit.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

From Psalm 51

In a world that can leave us feeling dirty, polluted or compromised, a river can be a place of washing. Let us confess our sin to God and ask him to cleanse our lives:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

...

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

...

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Assurance

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.



Bible Reading: Acts 2: 41-47 (NIV)

Another form of boundary or threshold is the one that we cross when we become baptised. The waters of baptism are a sign of God adopting us into the family of his church, as we cross from the old life ruled by sin and death into the new life under his sovereignty.

⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.



Reflection: A New Imagination for Church

Nigel Mann

We might have thought we knew what church was. COVID-19 has presented us as faithful communities an opportunity to reconsider and evaluate what it means to be the people of God today – scattered and active, worshipping but separated, wanting communion but unable to meet. What does it mean for our imaginations to be shaped toward a refreshed and new understanding of the church for today and for a bright future?

Activity: Lego Church

Young Reuben and Gabriel have created for worship this week some models from their imagination of what it means to do or be church. You too might like to make a model of what new things you can see that God wants to be doing in and through the church. You can share it with us on Ringwood Church of Christ Facebook page or bring it with you to Zoom Communion at 11am on Sunday.



Message

Penny Martin

"In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger – something better, pushing right back."

Albert Camus

It's been a few weeks since I have spoken to you all in this way and a very challenging few weeks for many people. How are we travelling? I have found this series to be both personally confronting/challenging and also very encouraging to keep my eyes up and beginning (even in the face of exhaustion, grief and anger) to imagine some creative and interesting ideas for how we continue to be God's people in the world today.

This week we are concluding our series by looking at a new imagination for Church. Springing out of the past weeks where Kaye, Dave and Ken have built a really solid foundation for this – let me bring a few things together. I don't really want to talk about finishing or landing – I am increasingly seeing all that we are exploring together as a constant invitation to leap (or spring). How do we use all that we have been exploring as helping us become more adept into the future?

I can't think of many times in my life where it is more important to build a new imagination for what Church is and will be in the future.

I love this Acts reading. I love the energy and inspiration – I love this positive testimony to the life of a thriving, active community of faith in these times. It has been used throughout time to emphasise the real possibilities of a healthy community of faith. Sometimes it has been used as a prescriptive – but that’s not always helpful or empowering. This was a contextual response to the times in which the early church was navigating the world. It was new and adaptive and I’m interested in briefly looking at this text to see what might fire in our imaginations for now and for the future ...

Some observations from Acts 2:

- The church was devoted to listening and learning as a priority
“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (vs. 42)
- The church was active in embodying hope, wonder and good news
“Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles” (vs. 43)
- Community was central
“All the believers were together and had everything in common.” (vs. 44)
- They were sacrificial and generous
“They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” (vs. 45)
- They met together when they could but broke bread in homes - redefining ideas of community / communion
“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,” (vs. 46)

The church was very present in the community (the temple courts were the hub of daily rituals, Jewish hub, the marketplace and centre of community interaction) – the church wasn’t separate from society, it was immersed and incarnational.

People were attracted to a thriving, present, loving, generous, responsive community – why wouldn’t they be?

Perhaps this isn’t so much about new imaginings – but about being reminded to strip away some of the baggage of the years and traditions and of our own making to be reminded again of the essence of Church in order to more creatively step into that place going forward ...

Some theological reminders that are helpful:

- God is God and we are not! We get to partner – but God is about God’s business powering on through history, through plagues and famines and wars and wounds ...
- The world is not as it should be ... seems obvious but it’s important to press into this
- God wants to heal and reconcile and desires the health of our nation and our world.
- God’s strategy? INCARNATION ... “the church must function as a living sacrament, a place and movement where the grace of God is palpable and where the people of the world can see and experience ‘in the flesh’ what God is imagining for the created world.” (p. 159)
- God provides gifts to the Church to fulfil the agenda for healing and wholeness.
“harmonious diversity”
- We are called to be obedient rather than responsible and THIS IS THE KEY
(Adapted from R. Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*)

Reimagining does not mean we throw out all the things from the past. It means we sift and hold, and mould and shape and adapt and integrate and create ... it means sometimes to remember the essentials.

Imagine ... if we continued to make sure we reached those who were not connected with our physical churches, and those who may never have been brave enough or able - to encourage them to come to church. The young, the differently-abled, those sleeping rough, those with difficult past experiences (to name but a few).

Imagine ... if we continued to be proud of our abilities to adapt and be creative and inclusive in how we practice being the church.

Imagine ... If we continued to embrace new and emerging technologies with an eye to harnessing them for God's ongoing Kingdom – rather than fearing them or resisting them.

Imagine ... if we continued to listen deeply and seek experience and wisdom – not just from people in our movement, but from healthcare workers, psychologists, teachers, scientists, artists, children?

Imagine ... if we continued to do things that show responsibility and respect for the vulnerable – not because we are told to do so by authorities, but because we love and respect others as our default.

Imagine ... if we didn't rush eagerly back out of the wilderness forgetting too quickly - but having learned the valuable and lasting lessons of perseverance, courage, the value of freedoms and choice ... and the faith of placing our shaking hands trustingly into the firm grip of our generous and loving God. Trusting in the provision.

We are called to be obedient to God, rather than responsible for the future.

IMAGINE ... (prayer)

“hope for abundant life for all, for the flowering of justice, for peace that will come and be sustained, for social and individual equality, for integrity and honesty in personal and political spheres, for joy and happiness, for the possibility of the routines of a normal life, for freedom to live without fear and intimidation, for a happy family and community life, for healing, for personal and systemic reconciliation, individual and social salvation, transformation, peace with justice, desire for the flowering of ... [Australia's] culture – a culture overflowing with simplicity and honesty, affection, reason, a heart for and a commitment to others, awareness of God, human love.”

(R. Suderman, *Re-Imagining the Church*, p. 157 – my addition in brackets).

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday to share in communion together through Zoom at [rngwd.com/communion](https://ringwoodchurchofchrist.org.uk/rngwd.com/communion) or Facebook Live at facebook.com/RingwoodChurchOfChrist or after you have shared in communion below, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,
and they all drank from it.*

Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

Thanksgiving

Nigel

Almighty God,

*Thank you for all your goodness and loving-kindness to me and to all whom you
have made.*

I bless you for creating me, feeding me, and for all the blessings of this life.

*But above all, I thank you for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the
world by our Lord Jesus Christ who offered his life like a ransom to buy our
freedom.*

I praise you for your grace to us and for the hope it gives us.

Give your church such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may proclaim your praise, not only with our words, but with our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in new life; through Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit belong the kingdom the power and the glory now and forever.

Amen.

Song: The Blessing

For a closing blessing enjoy this video created by churches all across Australia

<https://theblessingaustralia.com/>

The Lord bless you
And keep you
Make his face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn his
Face toward you
And give you peace

Amen

May his favor
Be upon you
And a thousand generations
And your family
And your children
And their children
And their children

May his presence
Go before you
And behind you
And beside you
All around you
And within you
He is with you
He is with you

In the morning
In the evening
In your coming
And your going

In your weeping
And rejoicing
He is for you
He is for you

He is for you
He is for you

CCLI Song # 7147007

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Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.
Thank you!