

## PAPER CHURCH



### **A little intro and some tips**

I think it is worth acknowledging that this is a unique moment in the life of Ringwood Church of Christ, when we are in different places and spaces today and yet still essentially unified in our desire to connect with one another and with our creator God. My 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. I encourage you to use this guide in a way that feels comfortable and most helpful and here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

1. Get prepared for worship – have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food 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.
2. Get into a 'sacred' space. It's important, when we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship. Be intentional. Some examples of how you might prepare: 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.
3. Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house – housemates/family, consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. Or you might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space.

**Sunday 22 March 2020**  
**“Looking Back to Look Ahead: A Time to Experiment” (Matthew 14)**

**Let us begin with prayer**

(To begin... silence for a moment or two, and breathe)...

Creator and creative God,

We gather today as your people although we are far apart, in different homes and unusual places we share our common hope and desire to connect with you and with each other as your people in this time. God, would you teach us today and in the days to come what it means to be your scattered church, what it means to be creative and experimental in our attempts (however halting) to worship you, to hear from your Word, to pray and most importantly to live generously into ways of compassion, hope, grace and Shalom.

Be gentle with us in this time. Would you speak to us today in this simple act of worship and would your Word bring to us some comfort, some challenge, some inspiration, some courage and equip us for your good work in our changing world.

Open our hearts today.

Amen

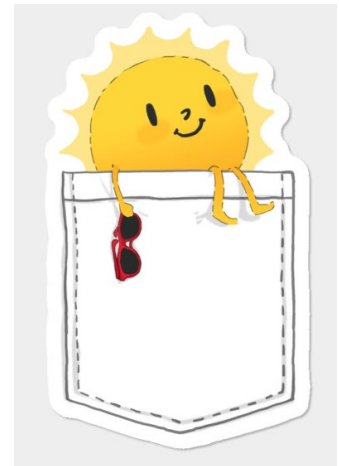
**A Song of Worship “Pocketful of Faith” (Tim Hughes, 2015)**

If we were meeting at church we would normally sing – feel free to do so in the comfort of your own home or to listen to something that inspires you to worship.

If you are able you might want to watch the following YouTube clip from Tim Hughes “Pocketful of Faith” (2015): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kskdGovofTM&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kskdGovofTM&feature=emb_title) or you might just enjoy reflecting on the lyrics of the song and the artistic image of Mark 4:30-32 (below).

Tim wrote Pocketful of Faith, this beautiful song as a modern-day take on the parable of the mustard seed (see image below)... and he says this about the song words:

*"I wrote this song with Nick Herbert, and he came up with the phrase "pocketful of faith," which is a modern day equivalent to Luke 17:6. We may not have mustard seeds in our pocket, but if I reach into my pocket I pull out a receipt, a couple of coins and a guitar pick, and it may not feel like it will change the world or have an impact. It feels so small. The modern day equivalent is that our faith is small and doesn't feel impressive, but if I present it to God, He can take it and do something truly extraordinary."*  
 (Tim Hughes)



### **Pocketful of Faith (Lyrics)**

I don't want to get there  
 At the end of it all  
 Looking behind me  
 To see there was so much more  
 Take this pocketful of faith  
 It is all I have today  
 I'm giving it all  
 I'm giving it all

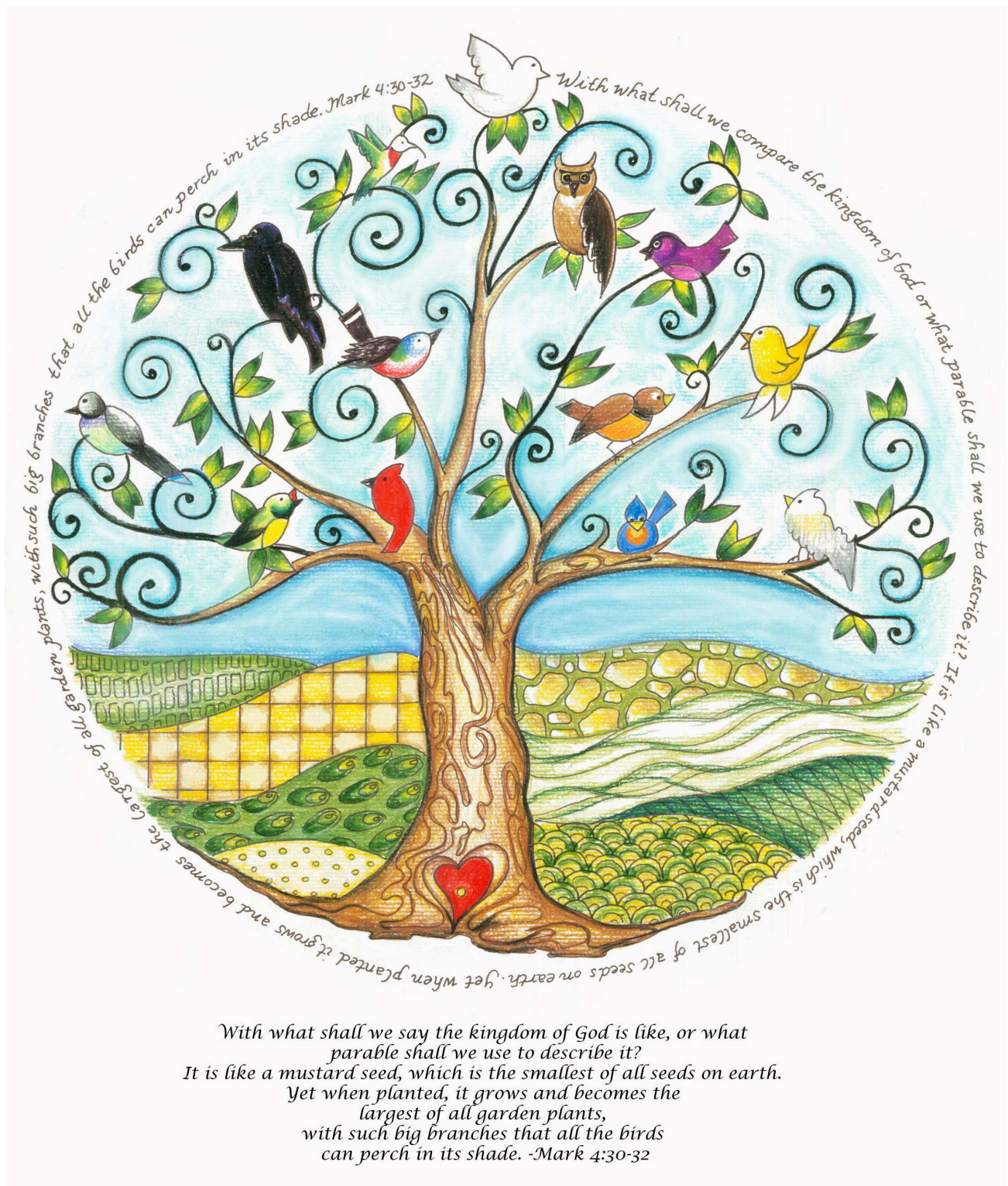
You will always have my heart  
 Everyday I'll trust You more, oh God  
 Take this pocketful of faith  
 It is all I have today  
 I'm giving it all  
 I'm giving it all

Leaving the safety  
 Here at the shore  
 Beyond the horizon  
 I see there is so much more  
 Take this pocketful of faith  
 It is all I have today  
 I'm giving it all  
 I'm giving it all

You will always have my heart  
 Everyday I'll trust You more, oh God  
 Take this pocketful of faith  
 It is all I have today  
 I'm giving it all  
 I'm giving it all

Anywhere You go I'll follow  
 When You call my name I'll run  
 Lead me on into tomorrow  
 Light my way like the rising sun...

An image to use alongside the song “Pocketful of Faith” for reflection and prayer



Artist: Amy Panfalone

## Communion (have some food prepared for this time)

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 a small group of people.

If you are alone – 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.

If you are with others consider each taking part in the following readings as well as intentionally bringing to mind the broader community of faith.

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### Reading 1: John 6:35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

You are invited to join with other members of our church community, and with many people of faith the world over, to share in communion, breaking bread, the Lord's Supper.

### Reading 2: Matthew 11:28-29

Jesus invites us: <sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

**The Bread** (take/share your food in this moment)

This is the body of Christ, the bread of life—given for you. Amen.

**The Cup** (take/share your drink in this moment)

This is the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation—shed for you. Amen.

### Prayer

(If you are a group you might want to share your joys/concerns together in preparation for the following prayer.)

Thank you, God, that you have given us your Son, Jesus, who is the true bread from heaven and food that nourishes our life. We lift up to you, this day, the joys and concerns of our hearts:

*(Add in here your own joys and concerns)*

So, strengthen us in your service that our daily living may show our deep gratitude for your unconditional love and generous grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen



## **Bible Reading: Matthew 14:13-36 (NRSV)**

(If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections)

*<sup>13</sup> When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.<sup>14</sup> When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

*<sup>15</sup> As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."*

*<sup>16</sup> Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."*

*<sup>17</sup> "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.*

*<sup>18</sup> "Bring them here to me," he said. <sup>19</sup> And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. <sup>20</sup> They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>21</sup> The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

### **Message for today**

This weekend is the third week of our Lent Series "Looking Back to Look Ahead" and the applicability of this week's focus on **experimenting** is both astounding and deeply encouraging considering the times we are facing right now. It feels like EVERYTHING I am doing in these past few busy days has been adapting and experimenting. You might be the same. I reached out to a number of colleagues, neighbours, friends and family members in the past few days to check in and many of them reflected on being anxious, being really busy and having to adapt to new things in a very short period of time.

Even as I write this type of message I am aware of a level of experimentation for me right now.

Some people love a creative, risky, experimental spaces (I am probably one of these people) and others find that kind of environment confronting and overwhelming. Where do you find yourself?

One of the most powerful things about 'looking back' and learning from the past is that our learning often invites us to experiment with the present – toward the future. Dave Gibbons writes: "Those who follow Jesus embody fluidity, adaptation and collaboration... Adaptable to changing circumstances. To challenging cultures. To complex crises and problems. If there's one quality that matters most to the fate of the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it's adaptability." Wow – are these not prophetic and important words for God's people this weekend? The changes that are rapidly unfolding for us all right now are not only a seismic shift in how we do life, a massive inconvenience and an exercise in uncertainty – they are also an opportunity for adaptation and creative experimentation.

I am currently teaching a Preaching class at Stirling Theological College and my suspicion is that practicing the skill of public speaking and preaching/learning to craft a good message is not ideally done in self-isolation or alone in your home-office. It is ideally done in a collaborative and constructive community of learners who generously share the journey together. But here we are... the University of Divinity has closed their doors and every course is now online. It's tough – mainly for students, but on Thursday afternoon as we experimented together in class with new technologies we all learnt a lot about ourselves, felt proud of our efforts and were reminded of just

who we are called to be as people trying to preach messages of hope to a scattered church – these guys will be on the cutting edge of potentially future ways of preaching in changing times. For now we just need to try some new things, learn some new skills and walk some new pathways – with patience, trust and grace.

In Matthew 14 Jesus is busy feeding thousands of people, performing miraculous signs and healing people. He has been teaching so much about the character of God's Kingdom of good news and in this chapter he is just busy practically and prophetically responding and adapting as circumstances and opportunities pile in. In a world currently characterised by empty supermarket shelves – it's interesting to reflect on Jesus feeding the 5000, (Matt 14:13-21). Jesus has just lost one of his closest and most supportive allies in his Kingdom work – John the Baptist to a brutal death. The text tells us that Jesus withdrew to be on his own (14:13), to grieve and mourn and reflect, but the crowds followed him, yearning to listen to him and be healed.

The circumstances are not ideal – but Jesus adapts and responds. The interesting part comes when the disciples try to intervene and send the crowd away and Jesus instructs them to feed all the people gathered – numbering in the 1000s, from the disciples own little stockpile of precious food, five loaves and two fishes, or right now – five little tins of tomatoes and two packets of pasta. There's not enough Jesus!

Jesus is pressing into defaults in this story. He knows that experimentation takes us out of comfort zones and defaults, so he tests it out. Much has been written about what the 'true' miracle is in this story. Is it that Jesus was miraculously about to transform a little into a lot very quickly? Perhaps, and I do believe that such a miracle is possible, but maybe the real miracle is that people learned a lesson in unselfishness. As Jesus and the disciples willingly shared what little they had, others realised that they could share what little they had too and there was, of course, more than enough for all.

Jesus gives us a powerful example here of what it means to be active and experimental in all kinds of emerging situations – especially as we are the scattered Church this weekend. Let's embrace generous and responsible experimentation in these crazy times – offering, as Jesus did, a vision of calm, of abundance, of unselfishness, hope for the future, beyond the present, and we might be surprised by the contagious nature of not only COVID-19, but of generosity.

### **Closing Prayer**

**Excerpt from “Prayer for Conscience and Courage” Joan Chittister**

Loving God,  
lead us beyond ourselves  
to care and protect,  
to nourish and shape,  
to challenge and energize  
both the life and the world  
You have given us.

God of light and God of darkness,  
God of conscience and God of courage  
lead us through this time  
of spiritual confusion and public uncertainty.

Lead us beyond fear, apathy and defensiveness  
to new hope in You and to hearts full of faith.

**As we go**

**An experiment: “Praying for your street/neighbourhood”**

Choose one of the following options (as suitable to your circumstances) to intentionally pray for those in close proximity to you today.

1. Prayer-walk. Go for a walk along your street and pause to pray at each house, or at various places for the people who live, worry, work and play in each place.
2. Write up cards with a simple message of neighbourly interest, expressions of solidarity and (as practical) offers of assistance in these uncertain times and drop them in letter boxes.
3. Use your phone map apps (google maps etc.) to look around your area and pray for various parts of the neighbourhood – shop owners, schools, clubs etc.
4. Just sit quietly and pray