



Sunday 19 April 2020
Story Sunday – Glimpses of the Kingdom

A little intro and 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. 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.

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

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.

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. Or you might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space.

A Song of Worship “Faithful Now”

[Verse 1]

I am holding on to faith
'Cause I know You'll make a way
I don't always understand, I don't always get to see
But I will believe it, I will believe it

[Chorus]

You make mountains move
You make giants fall
You use songs of praise
To shake prison walls
I will speak to my fear, I will preach to my doubt
You were faithful then, You'll be faithful now

[Verse 2]

I am standing on Your word
Calling heaven down earth
You will fight my enemies, this will end in victory
I will believe it, I will believe it

[Chorus]

You make mountains move
You make giants fall
You use songs of praise
To shake prison walls
I will speak to my fear, I will preach to my doubt
You were faithful then, You'll be faithful now

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You Tube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YexUJ2WHik>

Bible Reading: Matthew 13:31-35 (NIV)

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

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

³¹ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

³⁴ Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables,

I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

Jesus – the original storyteller. According to these two little stories, glimpses of the Kingdom of God can be discerned in small, seemingly insignificant and reasonably ordinary things. Small things can lead to momentous experiences. Smallness with love and thoughtfulness can lead to expansive, nourishing, life-giving reality and this cannot help but result in good news – the core characteristic of the Kingdom. Each of the stories being shared today give us a little glimpse of the good news of God’s surprising and expansive kingdom. Enjoy.

Story 1 (Danni Brown)

We moved to Ringwood North 12 months ago but still had the two boys going to school in Mt Waverly and I was still travelling to work in Glen Iris. Therefore, we didn’t initially have a lot of time getting to know our neighbours. We all thought that once summer arrived we would get out and meet people but that didn’t really work due to a summer of bushfires and all the complexities of life. Then, the next thing we know we are in COVID-19 and in lockdown.

So we hadn’t had a chance to meet our neighbours but I found myself at home and thought that I would just put together a little package for them. The package included some tissues, chocolates and toilet paper with a note saying, “Sorry we haven’t had a chance to meet yet, but thinking of you, we’re all in this together and if you need help here’s my number, please reach out.” I just left them at each letter box of all the neighbours in our court.

I think within about an hour I had several messages from neighbours introducing themselves and saying “Thanks for the note, really lovely if we can help you guys as well, please let us know.” It was just really lovely to get a real sense of community amongst people we hadn’t met yet. The next day we had a package left on our doorstep of home-grown vegies, and some bought vegies from a neighbour as well, which was great just to experience people pitching in and helping out.

Then, last week when Craig, my husband, was in hospital I had a message from one of the neighbours again, who had obviously seen the ambulance in our driveway, just reaching out going “Hey Danni, looks like it’s our turn to help you, let us know what we can do”. It’s been really lovely. We haven’t met face to face with them yet, but we have this community that’s started. We are going to put together a WhatsApp group and create that connection and support network for each other.

Story 2 (Jessica Gardner)

Jessica was inspired to start up a Facebook Group called “Love your neighbour Melbourne: COVID – 19 inspired local connections” on 13 March 2020, to draw people together to embody a spirit of compassion and generosity. Jess writes on the Facebook page: “Love you neighbour by doing something kind and reaching out in simple practical ways. Transform your fear in the process.”

Used with permission, here is Jess’s reflection on National Neighbour Day (29 March 2020).

“Hi everyone, my name is Jess and I am ‘admin’ for Love your neighbour Melbourne. Just jumping in to say Hello and wish you a very happy National Neighbours’ Day. We started the Facebook Group *Love your neighbour Melbourne: COVID-19 inspired local connections* just over two weeks ago. We started without a strategic plan, without any sense of the kind of impact that you were going to have on your community really, we just started with a confidence in the goodness of the idea of loving your neighbour and the difference that could make.

Obviously, it’s not a new idea, it’s not a new concept, it’s one that is as old as time but it’s one that has particular relevance for us at this time. We now have almost 10,000 people in the Melbourne group, which is unbelievable, and I am still shocked as I just check in on the numbers. To be honest, what is even more impacting for me is not the numbers in themselves but that each one of those numbers represents a life, a life that has connected with the idea of reaching out for help, for offering help.

Some people are a part of it just to be encouraged and to cheer others on. That matters and it makes a difference and when we are talking about love, even the smallest intention, the smallest opening of your heart, the smallest action, can make a huge difference. So it doesn’t matter what your resources are, what your contexts are, what your limitations are, I just really encourage you. I am encouraged as I read stories and as I see little messages pop up, that every little bit of loving makes a difference. We have other groups in other states and a shout out to those groups and admins and moderators, we appreciate all the volunteer work you’re putting in to make it happen.

I don’t know about you, but I have never faced a global pandemic before and I am finding it quite scary. One of the things for me at the beginning of this journey of ‘Love your Neighbour’ has been that I want to take an intentional posture of not being driven by the fear that I have but choosing to love. I think love is a stronger force than fear. Love is what is going to keep us connected and help us to transform our own fears and to build better community at this time. Thank you so much for being a part of it.

Feel free to share what a difference loving your neighbour has made to you. Perhaps you have been encouraged. Perhaps you have been challenged. Perhaps you have new ideas that are sparking new intention to join with some local groups. Thank you for joining me on the journey.”

Story 3 (Linda Barry – Prayer Shawls)

It's nearly 12 months since Natalie Robson introduced the prayer shawl ministry to the congregation. A couple of years prior to that Natalie had spent some time teaching in Canada and whilst there she worshipped at the Fairmont Avenue United church in Toronto. It was here that Natalie was introduced to a group of women who faithfully and prayerfully knitted shawls for people experiencing difficult seasons in their lives.

When Natalie left the church to return home she was gifted a shawl and she brought that along to one of our Shakhara worship gatherings soon after. I still remember the experience of that day. Standing in a circle each person had the shawl wrapped around them and a blessing was offered. The colour of the shawl, the softness of the yarn, the warmth and the words spoken had a profound effect on me. My physical body enjoyed the beautiful colour and feel of the shawl, but there was something much deeper happening in my spirit. I felt as though I was being covered by grace, warmed by the love knitted into the shawl and blessed by the kindness and generosity of faithful disciples both known and unknown to me. It seemed natural to want to share this gift with others.

Soon conversations began as to how we could establish this ministry at Ringwood. There were practical issues to be sorted out and the Fairmont church generously shared information with us, their pattern, what yarn to use and the words of the blessing which we have now adopted. Both the ministry team and our congregation have warmly embraced this new ministry – it is flourishing and we are thankful for that. So, in less than 12 months we now have 31 faithful friends knitting and we have already gifted 20 shawls. These shawls have gone to people who have lost loved ones, people in hospital, those undergoing lengthy medical treatments, those struggling with mental health issues and some to those who just need to know that someone cares. The shawls are gifted in beautiful gold organza bags made by one of our lovely ladies here at Ringwood and a blessing is enclosed. They are a love offering to friends both inside and outside our church community.

In thinking about Kingdom values this morning I think this ministry reflects many of them. The shawls are infused with the prayers of the faithful. They are an expression of love for our neighbours. They are offered in compassion to those who are suffering and they offer us an opportunity to serve and to bring the Lord's message of love, hope and peace into the lives of others. We have received some lovely messages of thanks from recipients of the shawls and here are some glimpses of those: "My shawl is a real treasure. My shawl wraps me in warmth and love as I read and sit in my hospital bed. Your gift really means a lot to me, it makes me feel loved and encouraged and enfolded in the arms of God." This lady also directed us to Hebrews 13:16 "And do not neglect doing good and sharing. For with such sacrifices God is pleased."

I would like to finish by reading the blessing we enclose with each shawl, but before that can I just say that if someone comes to mind in the days and weeks ahead that you feel would benefit from receiving a shawl please contact myself, or Natalie Robson or the church office. And also, if you find yourself with some extra time at the moment and would like to knit a shawl, I encourage you to contact us also. We have beautiful coloured yarn, needles and an incredibly easy pattern to knit.

The blessing:

May you gently wrap this shawl around you, surrounded by its love, enfolded in its prayer,
embraced by its warmth, and cradled in its softness.

May your shoulders be warmed by the soft grace of this continuous thread interlocking you with all
goodness.

May you feel the presence of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of those who love you.

Amen.

Andrea Salmon's reflections

These are just some of the glimpses of the Kingdom we're seeing, and in the (online) foyer you might like to share other glimpses you're aware of.

I see more glimpses when I reflect on the way we were able to convert the Easter Extravaganza into a letter club with 57 children receiving letters over the past couple of weeks. Children we know and some we didn't until now.



The way the churches and support agencies across Maroondah have come together to work with the council for pantry and meals for those in our community who need this support. For the way Winter Shelter has been able to convert to a meal program and mobilise volunteers from all the churches in a different but valuable way. The way Alpha has been converted to an online program. Glimpses of a creative God; A kingdom full of love and compassion.





As we come to a time of communion would you join with me in a prayer time. I will leave space for you to add names or situations you're aware of and encourage you to let us know your concerns through the connect cards

Prayer(s of the Church)

Dear Lord Jesus, our creator, our guide, our strength, our comforter.

We are blessed by the glimpses of your Kingdom that we see around us every day.

We thank you for our homes and we pray for those without safe places to call home.



In our homes help us be patient, kind and generous to each other. Or if we're alone help us feel that we are still surrounded by your love and the love of our friends and family.

We thank you for the neighbourhoods where we live, you have us here for such a time as this and we pray that you can use us in our neighbourhood. Thank you for the connections we have.



We pray for those who feel isolated from their neighbours, help us to reach out, to make connections and to build bridges. Help us feel safe and secure in making those connections. Be with those who are finding the isolation overwhelming, strengthen them to reach out for support.

We thank you that we live in a country where the health system is strong. Be with the doctors and nurses, scientists and vast teams of people keeping the health system going.

Please be with the decision makers and advisors who are guiding this state and country through a time they've never experienced before. Help them with wisdom, rest, insight and balance.

Lord, we ask you to be with everyone who cannot self-isolate, workers everywhere who still go out to work and may be feeling vulnerable and at risk. Strengthen them, keep them well.

Lord, be present in countries where systems are struggling, be present in Vanuatu and Fiji and other pacific islands impacted by the recent cyclone, be present for people grieving loved ones.

It's a lot to ask but we know the Holy spirit can bring peace, can strengthen, can move in tiny and in mighty ways.

Show us ways to be like yeast, making a difference, writing a letter supporting a cause, lifting up someone in need, reaching out to someone struggling.

We thank you Lord, that we can still be used even in this time of social distancing, we thank you that you're not distant. Amen

Communion – (have some food and drink prepared for this time)

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday on Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion 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.

Communion is a time for us to reflect on the huge sacrifice God made in sending Jesus to die on the cross. To die in order to remove any barriers to a relationship with the creator of the universe, to rise again to show us God's power over death, to rise again to remind us that there's nothing that can't be overcome. Jesus used the bread they had on the table to represent his body and the wine they were sharing to represent his blood, the blood of a new covenant, a new promise made between God and man. During the last supper, while they were eating, 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.

And now, we can do that, quietly reflecting and giving thanks to God for the glimpses we see all round us of His Kingdom.

Please share in your elements 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 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.

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, you know sacrifice, you know loss, you know rejection and isolation. But you also know victory. We thank you and join with you in praise. Thank you for Jesus, thank you for loving us, thank you for reminding us of your love.

Amen