

# PAPER CHURCH

## **A New Imagination for Activism – Isaiah 61**

*Sunday 26 July 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

*Natalie Palmer*

In amongst all the uncertainty, stress and isolation we all feel at this time as Melburnians in lockdown yet again, I draw comfort, strength and hope from praising God. Lyrics like "...weak made strong, in the Saviour's love" and "Through the storm, He is Lord, Lord of all" helps me to lean into my faith and face whatever comes at us with more grace and strength than I could ever have alone.

I encourage you to read over Ephesians 2, especially verses 13-22.

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*Together we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. v20*

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## Song: Cornerstone

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name

Christ alone cornerstone  
Weak made strong in the Saviour's love  
Through the storm He is Lord  
Lord of all

When darkness seems to hide His face  
I rest on His unchanging grace  
In every high and stormy gale  
My anchor holds within the veil  
My anchor holds within the veil

He is Lord Lord of all

When He shall come with trumpet sound  
Oh may I then in Him be found  
Dressed in His righteousness alone  
Faultless stand before the throne

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## Song: I'm Your Servant

Now into Your presence Lord  
I will boldly come  
It's only by Your grace oh Lord  
It's nothing I have done

Grant me Your servant heart  
That I might live like You  
As You set me apart  
I will humbly share the love I found in You

I'm Your servant here I am  
Bended knees and open hands  
Lord I hear Your voice today  
Lord I hear and I obey

When I'm weak will You be strong  
When I'm lost will You lead me home  
Though I struggle on the way  
Would You use me anyway  
Lord I give my self today

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## Bible Reading: Isaiah 61 (NIV)

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

The Spirit of the Lord God  
has taken control of me!  
The Lord has chosen and sent me  
to tell the oppressed  
the good news,  
to heal the brokenhearted,  
and to announce freedom  
for prisoners and captives.  
<sup>2</sup>This is the year  
when the Lord God  
will show kindness to us  
and punish our enemies.  
The Lord has sent me  
to comfort those who mourn,  
<sup>3</sup> especially in Jerusalem.  
He sent me to give them flowers  
in place of their sorrow,

olive oil in place of tears,  
and joyous praise  
in place of broken hearts.  
They will be called  
"Trees of Justice,"  
planted by the Lord  
to honor his name.  
<sup>4</sup>Then they will rebuild cities  
that have been in ruins  
for many generations.  
<sup>5</sup>They will hire foreigners  
to take care of their sheep  
and their vineyards.  
<sup>6</sup>But they themselves will be  
priests and servants  
of the Lord our God.  
The treasures of the nations  
will belong to them,

and they will be famous.  
<sup>7</sup>They were terribly insulted  
and horribly mistreated;  
now they will be greatly blessed  
and joyful forever.  
<sup>8</sup>I, the Lord, love justice!  
But I hate robbery  
and injustice.  
My people, I solemnly promise  
to reward you  
with an eternal agreement.  
<sup>9</sup>Your descendants will be known  
in every nation.  
All who see them will realize

that they have been blessed,  
by me, the Lord.  
<sup>10</sup>I celebrate and shout  
because of my Lord God.  
His saving power and justice  
are the very clothes I wear.  
They are more beautiful  
than the jewelry worn  
by a bride or a groom.  
<sup>11</sup>The Lord will bring about  
justice and praise  
in every nation on earth,  
like flowers blooming  
in a garden.

## Message

*Ken Morgan*

I want to talk to you today about a new imagination for activism. Taken from Isaiah 61. We live in a world of causes. There is the environmental cause, with its compulsion to minimise the use of plastics, to minimise CO2 emissions, to be thoughtful about how much meat or dairy we eat based on how much CO2 or methane cows emit. There is a cause of human exploitation, which makes us thoughtful about where we get our coffee from or our chocolate or our clothing. There are waves of refugees pouring into Europe, pouring into the United States, into Australia from failed states in the world. There are waves of protest about endemic racism and persistent indigenous disadvantage in Australia, New Zealand in North America and in other places.

We go to Isaiah 61 and it paints an image or a vision for a world without causes. It's a world that's just, a world that's fair, a world that's peaceful, hopeful, a world that's free, beautiful, joyful. It's the kind of world that's imagined in songs like *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*. It's the kind of world that's imagined in songs like John Lennon's *Imagine*. A world where human beings are acting and behaving and collaborating at their very best and most responsible. Lots of people have tried and worked and given their lives to bring about this kind of world and if you've done your VCE history you would have probably studied the Bolshevik Revolution.

The Bolshevik Revolution was all about a group of idealistic people coming in and doing away with the Romanov family and their oppressive rule of Russia only to install themselves, the Bolsheviks, and ultimately we ended up with Russia under Stalin with 50 million people lost their lives to a dictator.

Or we look at people like Ghandi who fought tirelessly for a free India, to try and free India from the oppression of the English. Oddly enough strongly informed by Jesus teaching the Sermon on the Mount. Yet we find for lower caste Indians today – they are still stuck in grinding poverty, it's just that their oppressors are Indian rather than English.

Further ahead we think about Martin Luther King and his tremendously important struggle for African-American equality in the US. And yet there's been a series of riots and murders in a sort of ongoing cycle that's culminated in the recent Black Lives Matter movement which shows despite all of Martin Luther King's great efforts we've got along a long way to go.

Then we think about Mandela in South Africa and we all admire him as a man and as a follower of Jesus and yet for the average black South African life is still one mostly of grinding poverty and of escalating violence.

Structural and political solutions tend not to deliver lasting change or they have problematic side effects. I was curious to read in my research for this message that even though New Zealand is regarded as a world leader in terms of the treatment of their indigenous population, the poverty rate for Maoris is actually higher than for Indigenous Australians. So, 50% of Maoris live under the poverty line, whereas 32% of Indigenous Australians live under the poverty line. That said, both of those are double the numbers we have for non-indigenous people. So they're still terrible numbers. But even our structural efforts even in New Zealand, have proven to be ineffective in moving some of the stubborn indicators that suggest we are nowhere near what Isaiah 61 had imagined.

Jesus used Isaiah 61 to launch his ministry, his kind of first public announcement of himself in the synagogue at Capernaum: The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor... and so it went on, and Jesus concluded by saying and today this is fulfilled in your hearing. That doesn't mean that they have reached some kind of Nirvana, some kind of brilliant equality, some kind of world that's imagined by our songs. But Jesus was announcing its arrival, he announced the Kingdom of God. And if we take Isaiah 61 as a description, the Kingdom of God is the just, fair, equitable, responsible, sustainable, joyful world that we all long for. Oddly enough, Jesus in announcing the kingdom of God, his first instruction and call to everybody was to repent. He said repent the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent the Kingdom of God is at hand, the Kingdom is here and I'm the King.

His first instruction was always to repent. He wasn't just telling the Pharisees and the Romans and the tax collectors and sinners to repent, he was telling everybody. The way into the kingdom is to repent and that's our first thought in what is our part in bringing the Kingdom of God. What is our part in inaugurating this wonderful world that we are all longing for?

Our first responsibility is to take responsibility for our own brokenness, our own sinfulness, and to repent.

The Christian view about how to bring about this world is different from all the structural and political views, from the point of view that it deals with the root cause. The root cause traces its origins all the way back to the Garden narrative in Genesis.

Basically, the problem is set out in Genesis chapter 3. The fruit whether, you believe it literally or metaphorically, was all about human beings wanting to have agency for themselves, decide what's good for themselves and they're going to make their own heaven. The problem is when human beings, by themselves in their finite state try and make their own heaven, it's always at the expense of someone else.

So the kingdom of God is not about removing human rule and installing some other humans it's about bringing all of human rule under the order and the direction of God. It's not about a theocracy so much as about a human way of living, human government, everybody, the electors, the elected, the rulers, the ruled all looking to God for their guidance and for their wisdom in how we should conduct ourselves as a society.

The Christian worldview, basically because it calls everybody to repent, recognises that everybody's personal sin contributes to the messes the world experiences.

So rather than following the ways of normal activism does - normal activism is really about confessing the sins of everybody else. The Black Lives Matter movement, just and as appropriate as it is, is all about confessing the sins of white cops and white governments in power oppressing black people. It's confessing the sins of others. That's not to say that those people are not sinners, obviously when innocent people are killed by cops that's a bad thing.

But the Christian world view starts with the biggest problem in the world begins with me because I'm a sinner. The Christian world view encourages us firstly to confess our own sins rather than beginning with the sins of others. It leads us to a commonwealth of love not because people are kicked out of government so much is that society as a whole is everybody acting out of the character of God. Each one, in personal relationship with God, each person's conscience open to the influence of the Holy Spirit.

So how do we start to pull this off practically? Again, we look to the example of Jesus because Jesus as described in Philippians chapter 2, he emptied himself. He didn't look at the world and say - well you brought this all on yourself so deal with it! He emptied himself and became one of us. He let go of his rights and privileges, his comforts, all the honour and glory he was due, but he gave himself and was prepared to suffer. He spent more time with the disempowered than with the powerful. He was the embodiment of the new world order that he was trying to bring.

But interestingly he told parables about things being upside down and he told parables about things beginning really small. The parable about the yeast and the mustard seed, where parables about it beginning with things really small, individual, personal things that grow and develop momentum and become very large and life-giving.

Jesus spoke truth to power. It wasn't as if he didn't act politically at all. But he didn't seem to have any agenda to throw the Pharisees out who were kind of the antagonists in the gospel narratives. So much as he just called them to repentance like everybody else. Yeah sure, Jesus was hard on them and he wasn't a very good dinner guest if you're a pharisee. But he wasn't about sort of starting a revolution because revolutions are appropriately named, they revolve, they turn one lot of sinners out, then turn another lot of sinners in. But ultimately, like the people in Syria, or anyone else that was caught up in the Arab spring, they're still faced with the same problem of being ruled by sinners, it just might be a different set of sinners that they're ruled by.

Jesus advocated an upside-down approach - don't hanker for power but strive for love - very, very different and we find some of that caught up in the messages of people like Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

More importantly and fundamentally it's about humans as a race, alienated from God and the only way to inaugurate this new Kingdom is to become agents of reconciliation as Paul described in 1 Corinthians.

So, what are we going to do about this? My first encouragement to everybody and it's to myself as much to anyone else, is to accept responsibility for our own part in this issue. I need to accept the fact that regardless of how much worse I'd like to believe that everyone else is, I'm a sinner, I'm busted, I live parts of my life alienated from God and that in ways, even ways I don't understand, contributes to the problem of this broken world.

Then I need to accept responsibility for getting onto the solution side. This is where it gets tough because as Jesus demonstrated in Philippians, being part of the solution is uncomfortable. It's inconvenient, it's expensive, it's disruptive, it might even be risky. Jesus invites us in a new form of activism to become like him in getting his hands dirty and even shedding his own blood, sweat and tears, in pursuit of this new kingdom. It's not enough to just like a Facebook page or even donate to something. Jesus invites us to get involved, to become up-close and personal with those on the receiving end of the world's brokenness and the world's corruption and the world's unfairness.

So that means living a life of integrity, working as much as we reasonably can to not live the life of the sinner that contributes to the problem. But also identifying with those who suffer and suffering with them.

So, what do we do with all this? I really want to encourage you to think a couple of thoughts. First of all, what's the root cause that's closest to your heart? As you think about how the world bashes people up, who are the people you would like most to see freed and brought hope and brought equality, or you would like to see their lives closer to the kingdom? And I want to invite you to be like Jesus and to get your hands dirty helping them. How might you, like Jesus, announce the arrival of the kingdom, not just with your mouth but also with your behaviour?

If you're a kid and think how do I pull this off when I'm only a primary school kid or I'm only a secondary school kid? Let me put it to you simply. Where do you see people who are sad or lonely or hurt? Who are the people where for them life isn't much fun? My encouragement to you is to figure what you can do to be a friend to them.

## Response

Who and What inspires you toward activism? Have a think, see if you can write down some names of individuals, or an organisation, or a community.

If you have internet access, click through to [rngwd.com/267response](http://rngwd.com/267response) where you can type your response for others to see, and you can read through what others have written in.

## Prayer

*Natalie Palmer*

You may wish to read the prayer from this site in full

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/scotty-smith/a-prayer-reflecting-on-the-compassion-of-jesus/> or otherwise here is my version of the Lord's Prayer written for us today.

Our Father, Dwelling in the Heavenly Places,  
Holy and Wonderful is your Name  
May your ways become our ways,  
May your desires become our longings.  
We rely on you today for our basic daily needs.  
We look to your Spirit to sustain us, from our inner-most being outwards.  
Please forgive us when we stumble and fall short of your will and plans for us,  
for we are weak and need your grace, like the very air we breathe.  
Help us to give forgiveness freely and not hold onto grudges that will rot our  
souls.  
For there is none like you. Nothing and no-one compares to the amazing,  
awesomeness of your Divine Being,  
and the reach of your reign knows no boundaries.  
Amen.

## Communion

*Have some food and drink prepared for this time*

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at [rngwd.com/communion](http://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.

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:



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*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.*

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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.

## **Connect cards online**

*Click this link or enter it into your web browser [rngwd.com/connect](http://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!