

PAPER CHURCH

Becoming: A City – Jeremiah 29:7

Sunday 23 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

Harley Kitchen

Hello everyone! It's my turn to welcome you to worship as Ringwood Church of Christ on this Sunday 23 August. How good it is to be together, drawn into fellowship by the love of God.

Here we are thankful we are to be able to gather together each week. We can't imagine what a time of lockdown like this would be without these amazing ways of communication we have today.

We come with a deep need of reassurance that our lives, our Church, our city and our world are all safe in God's Hands. Isaiah 12 says "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord is my strength and my song". So, we open our minds and hearts afresh to the Spirit of God today to take our burdens of anxiety and give us a refreshing touch of His joy and peace:

As we read in Isaiah 61:

"a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of heaviness"

Prayer

Harley Kitchen

*Our loving God, we always come expectantly to You in worship.
We know You meet with those who really want to meet with You.*

We come with our anxieties about this pandemic we are in – and want to lay our burdens down – and receive into our spirits Your lifting and strengthening grace as we worship You.

Our God, you are our Rock and our Redeemer. On Christ the solid Rock we stand – in Jesus we have eternal life and hope for the future.

So, we come to this time of worship, prayer, and hearing Your voice, asking You to meet with us as only You can do.

In the Name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Today as we continue with our theme of "Becoming..." trying to discern what God is wanting His people to "become" during this crisis time and into the future, our concentration today is on our city. The city of Ringwood as the neighbourhood God has placed us in – and that we love and serve.

Kaye is going to be sharing with us a message on the basis of Jeremiah 29:7 which reads, "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you ..."

I think in all our hearts is a love for Ringwood and a recognition that there is a role for us as God's people to play in its future:

- Our Steering Committee has been having conversations with the local Council which will help in our understandings of cooperation together. (One aspect of this is their use of our carpark at present.)
- The Church Ministers of the area lead in a prayer at the beginning of each Council meeting.
- Our Oasis "soup kitchen" is currently the ONE free lunchtime offering for the people in Ringwood, contributing to the provision of evening meals and accommodation by various Churches through *Winter Shelter*.
- Other contributions through ministry to school life, people who are involved with *Maroondah Voice*, etc. are going on all the time ... even in this time of restrictions.

And in all we are involved in – and will be in the future – we are dependent on our Lord to bless this city in ways that are above our own efforts – to bring about the spiritual "peace and prosperity" that is so needed today in our world.

Take some time now, to read through or listen to the song used in our service last week, *Heaven to Earth*. As you dwell on the lyrics or the music ask God to bring to mind people and places in our city, and sit with these images and thoughts as you progress through our service today.

Heaven to Earth (We are Blessed)

Bring heaven to earth, Lord
Bring peace where there's fear
Bring life where there's death, Lord
Bring joy in these tears
Bring love where there's lust, Lord
Bring hope where there's pain
Bring rest where there's chaos
Bring faith where there's fame

You invite us to partner with you
To see your kingdom come

We are blessed, to bless a world in pieces
We are loved, to love where love is not
We are changed, to be the change you promised
We are freed, to be your hands, O God

Bring home to the homeless
Bring keys to the chained
Bring worth to the purchased
And touch to the shamed
Bring flesh from your word, Lord
Bring truth where there's spin
Bring risk where there's safety

And grace where there's sin

In the broken, we shall see restored
The image of our King

We are blessed...

Lord we cry out to you
Change the atmosphere
Breathe new life in all who gather here

We are blessed...

Bring justice to profit
Bring patience to growth
Bring wisdom to progress
Plant trees on this road
Bring freedom from debt, Lord
An end to excess
Bring closer your kingdom
By quiet success

May we grow in the knowledge of you
Through every heart and face

We are blessed...

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Bible Reading:

Jeremiah 29:7 (NIV)

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

2 Kings 24:8-16

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother's name was Nehushta daughter of Elnathan; she was from Jerusalem. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father had done.

At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it, and Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to the city while his officers were besieging it. Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him.

In the eighth year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. As the Lord had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed the treasures from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace, and cut up the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the Lord. He carried all Jerusalem into exile: all the officers and fighting men, and all the skilled workers and artisans—a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the prominent people of the land. The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand skilled workers and artisans."



Message

Kaye Reid

When I think about seeking the flourishing of the city I realise that I have lived in many places – as a little kid we lived on a farm in Wantirna South, our family were market gardeners in an area that was orchards and farms and which has now become, as the city has spread out further and further, part of the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. And for a period of time as a teenager I lived on a rural farm in Idaho, in the United States, I've lived in various suburbs in the east of Melbourne – Wantirna South, Boronia, Croydon South and Croydon Hills. I've lived closer to the city in an apartment in Glen Iris and for some time, home was upstairs on the High Street in Northern London. As a kid growing up we spent a lot of time at Flinders during school holidays in our grandparent's holiday house.

Great memories of different places, each with a sense of attachment and place and connection, some stronger than others. These are places that I have a heart for, having settled there for varying periods of time. Although, sometimes we are just a temporary occupant and at other times we deeply inhabit a place.

David Orr in *Ecological Literacy* suggests that,

"A resident is a temporary occupant, putting down few roots and investing little, knowing little, and perhaps caring little for the immediate locale beyond its ability to gratify. As both a cause and effect of displacement, the resident lives in an indoor world of office building and shopping mall, automobile, apartment, and suburban house and watches as much as four hours of television each day. The inhabitant, in contrast, "dwells" ... in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place. Good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness."

You will have your own places and connections. You might want to pause for a moment now and make yourself a list of all the places that you have lived. It might be a short list for some, perhaps only one or two places with deep roots, and for others this might be a long list representing many moves and new locations to settle into and get to know. It's a great conversation to have with family and friends and to discover something new about someone else that you might not have known or to be reminded yourself of where your journey has taken you so far.

Our scripture reading today is from Jeremiah 29 about the people of God having been taken to a place away from where they lived and instead of just waiting this time out and keeping to themselves they are called by God through the prophet Jeremiah to settle there, to plant gardens, to marry, to have families, to be fruitful. They are called to seek the peace and prosperity of the city and to be praying to God for this city and for its flourishing, its wellbeing, its shalom. Because somehow this city that they don't even necessarily want to be in is intertwined with their own flourishing, their own shalom, in the cosmic view of God.

Grab your bible, and pause when you need to, so that you can have a read around the text and sit with the words of God for us today.

The story about this is set up in 2 Kings 24:8-16 around 600 BCE when the young King Jehoiachin was King in Jerusalem and like most of the history of the kings of Israel, *"He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father had done."* (v9). King Nebuchadnezzar, who was King of Babylon, laid siege to Jerusalem and King Jehoiachin and his court eventually surrendered. The King and the Queen Mother and many of the elite were taken in exile to Babylon, leaving many others, particularly the poor, behind in Jerusalem. This was a strategy to remove the elite and reduce the possibility of rebellion. This was absolutely devastating for the people. Beyond what most of us could imagine or have experienced. The prophet Jeremiah was still back in Jerusalem but sent a letter to the surviving elders, priests, prophets and other people who were in exile in Babylon. (Jeremiah 29:1-3). The letter said:

"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'" (Jeremiah 29: 4-7)

The people have lost Jerusalem, their home, the city that mattered to them, the place where God was with them in the temple in Jerusalem, the place where they could make their sacrifices and offerings. We read that King Nebuchadnezzar, “removed the treasures from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace, and cut up the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the Lord.” (2 King 24:13). The city was important for their survival and for their sense of identity and for their connection with God. We hear the heartache and desolation in the words of Psalm 137, which is perhaps now even better known through the song by Boney M – the people sitting by the rivers of Babylon, where they sat down and wept as they thought of their city that they had been taken from, wondering how do they worship God away from the temple and seemingly God’s presence.

The city is important throughout scripture, which is interesting given that much of the gospels have an agricultural setting and feel in the parables and stories that Jesus shared, but the people and their lives continue to be drawn to the city. And in Revelation the new heavens and the new earth are described in images of a great and beautiful city, with wide streets, and a river flowing down the middle of the street. This is the future that God is leading us to.

The prophet Jeremiah’s instructions to settle there in Babylon were unexpected and disputed, understandably they wanted to be returning to Jerusalem and quickly. Some of the people wrote back to Jerusalem suggesting to the vassal King there that Jeremiah was a madman and should be put in prison and in stocks.

But the people are called to take a long view, that their time in exile will be at least 70 years, and during that time to be active and faithful, purifying and refining their faith, seeking the shalom of the city.

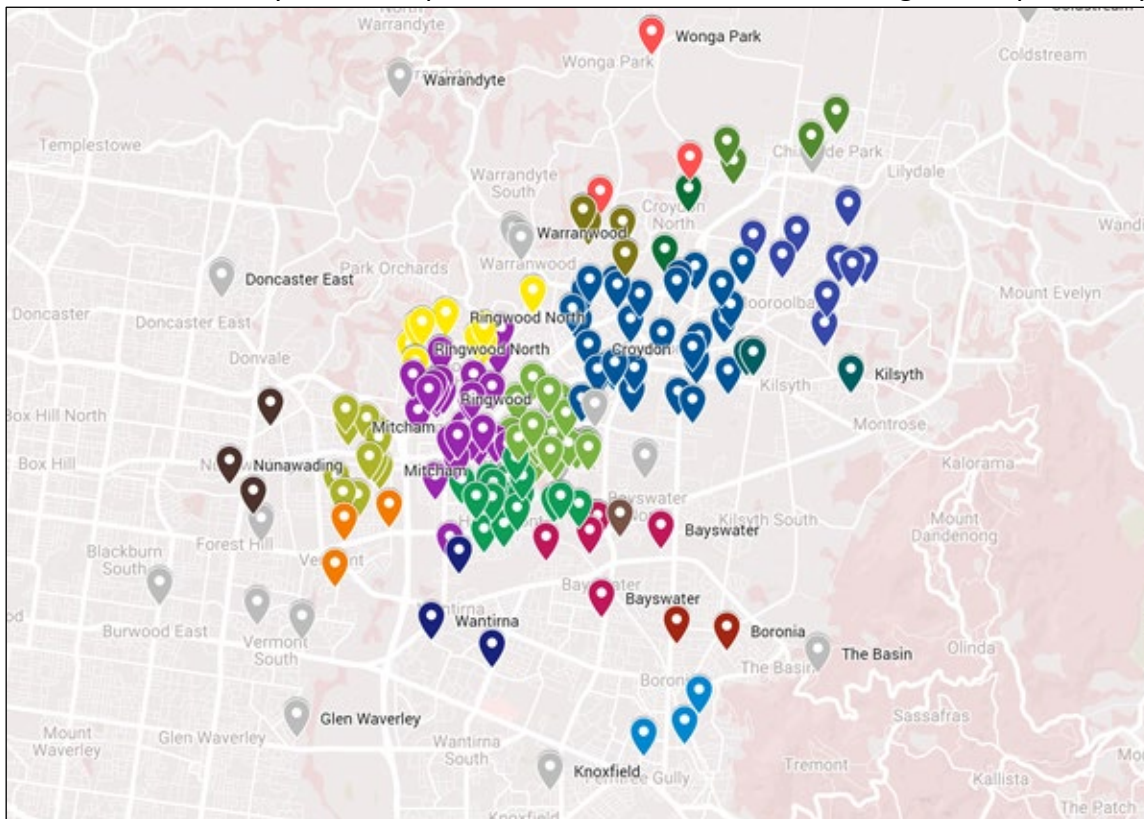
There are parallels for us now, finding ourselves in a global pandemic, in restrictions that limit us significantly. We can just wait it out knowing this is not how the world should be, or we can keep working towards acceptance of our situation, taking a long view, adapting to how to be active and faithful in this time and situation, seeking the flourishing of all people - neighbours and family and friends - seeking the shalom of the city, while God continues to purify and refine our faith during this difficult time, and in doing so helping us to be able to see and participate in what God is already doing.

Living under restrictions has turned our focus to our household and to our neighbours. This is a great thing to come out of this time. We have a local neighbourhood that we as individuals and households are called to.

To be ‘for’ our neighbours. To be known, to be available, to do life together, to care for each other. And we are aware of some great stories of this happening in small and meaningful ways. Keep pressing into what it looks like for you to be a great neighbour at this time.

In the same way that we are called as individuals and households to our local neighbours - those that live closest to us - at the same time as the body of Christ together we are called to the area of Ringwood as our church’s neighbourhood. As with many of us, this is not my own immediate

neighbourhood when I walk out my front door, it's not even quite in my 5km radius, but it is my nearest hub or town or city and it is a place that we have a collective calling and responsibility to.



This map shows where we, the people of this church, are located in and around Ringwood. Clusters of people particularly in Ringwood, Ringwood East, Heathmont and Croydon. And with outliers further out who travel into Ringwood from all directions.

This is our city to love. This is our city to be 'for', for the people, environment, structures, systems, and facilities. We want to be stretching towards our own hearts growing and developing, as a reflection of God's heart, for this city. This is part of what we continue to be and are becoming. A people who are seeking the shalom of this city Ringwood.

We want to ask ourselves together, are we becoming a blessing - a relevant and engaged part of the City of Ringwood? With so many pressures on our community as it has developed over the past centuries from native lands that were managed by the first peoples as the traditional custodians to European settlement, farming, mining and more recently urban development along with cultural and lifestyle changes, we as the body of Christ in our city must be prayerfully seeking the welfare of our location, of our place. And to be asking ourselves together how is God calling us to become a representative of love and faith in our city?

The Ringwood area is designated by Council to continue developing into a local hub, an Activity Centre. In the last year or so we were invited by Maroondah Council to contribute, along with others, to their interim review of their 2040 plan. The plan articulates a positive vision for the future of this area:

"In 2040, Maroondah will be a vibrant and diverse city with a healthy and active community living in green leafy neighbourhoods which are connected to thriving and accessible activity centres contributing to a prosperous economy within a safe, inclusive and sustainable environment."

Sounds good. We find ourselves centrally located in one of these growing activity centres, with the potential opportunity on our physical site to utilise the space to build a vertical village that serves our community. We have started the process over the past few years of exploring very intentionally what God may be calling us to do and become in seeking the shalom of this city. Our Future Development Steering Committee have provided an update by email during this past week (have a read if you haven't already) keeping us informed as we seek a mission-led, viable, building development on our current church site that makes it possible for us to continue to serve the needs of our local community into the future.

We are in the initial Discovery phase of a six-step process. This involves:

"The process of exploring, understanding and clarifying what is possible and any constraints or potential challenges. This involves collecting information as to local need, reviewing research, identifying and engaging with key stakeholders/advisors and gathering input from the church congregation. The intention of this phase is to widely explore and listen."

This week the Future Development group have been presented with the preliminary research, which we commissioned from Christian Research Australia, extending the picture for us beyond the data already available from Maroondah Council's future planning. This is great information and research to have to help guide us and inform us. This research will be shared with the whole church through upcoming 'town hall' Zoom meetings which will be held during September as we listen, learn, contribute and discern together in this Discovery phase.

Julia Baird in her fabulous book, *Phosphorescence: on awe, wonder and things that sustain you when the world goes dark*, talks about the "Overview Effect" the psychological effect that astronauts experience from flying in space and viewing the earth from that perspective. Author Frank White defined it as *"a profound reaction to viewing the Earth from outside its atmosphere"*.

"The Overview Effect turns astronauts into 'evangelists, preaching the gospel of orbit' as they return from space with a renewed faith or on a quest for wisdom. For some it's a kind of lingering euphoria that results in a permanent change of perspective."

Scott Kelly who spent a year on the International Space Station said:

"The planet is incredibly beautiful, breathtakingly beautiful ... you realise looking at the Earth that despite its beauty and its tranquilly, there's a lot of hardship and conflict that goes on. You look at the planet without borders, especially during the day. At night you can see countries with lights, but during the daytime it looks like we're all part of one spaceship, Spaceship Earth. And we're all flying through space together, as a team, and it gives you this perspective ... on humanity and you get this feeling that we just need to work better – much, much better - to solve our common problems."

I wonder whether what we hear and feel from the reflections of people who have had the incredible experience of orbiting in space is a glimpse of what God's perspective on humanity and the creation must be. God's heart bursting with love and compassion and goodness, desiring shalom for the environment and for all people. And this is the heart that we want to tap into within ourselves, this divine perspective of our neighbours and of this place Ringwood that we are called to love and serve.

And we don't do this alone but in partnership with others. Paul Sparks when he was with us a few years ago talked about noticing people of goodwill throughout our communities, like lights that shine across these spaces, shining, connecting, creating a web of goodwill, seeking and seeing the shalom of the city.

We partner with Council and many others. We think of some of the activities that Harley mentioned earlier and the work of groups like Maroondah Voice, sharing positive stories of wellbeing and challenging injustice in our local community, and of Winter Shelter, with the churches together responding to the huge issue of homelessness and the greater challenges over winter.

As we start this week, let us partner with God to in having a heart for our neighbours and for the city of Ringwood, seeking God's shalom for everyone.

Action:

This week be intentional when you exercise in your neighbourhood. Walk your 1 hour within your 5 kms and while you do so be listening, observing, and noticing. In your heart be seeking the shalom of the city, asking for a new imagination. Pray for your neighbourhood and this city. Listen to God and your desire for this place and these people. Ask God to show you your neighbourhood and this city as God already sees it.

Prayer

Let us pray together for our city and allow this prayer to form us as we pray it.



Ringwood Lake (Photo source: Maroondah Council)

God of our daily lives
God of this city
we pray for the environment around us

we pray for the people of this city
working and without work
homeless or well housed
fulfilled or frustrated
cluttered with stuff or collecting what is rejected
angrily scrawling on walls or reading the writing on the wall
lonely or living in community
finding our own space and respecting the space of others
we pray for these people and these places
our neighbours and strangers
mourning and celebrating
may we share in their sufferings and hope.

Amen

Adapted from a prayer by Jan Picard in Angela Ashwin's *The Book of a Thousand Prayers*

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 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.

If you're not able to join us on Zoom this week, Harley has put together some thoughts to centre us in this space.

As we gather for Communion today, with thoughts about the city, we think of Jerusalem whose authorities rejected Jesus and had him crucified. What happened when Jesus, Son of God died and rose again, was that He "faced-down" the evil in human authority and broke its power. Created a way of safety, a new world order, a kingdom of love.

The power of evil was shattered by the invincible power of God's love, through the sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross.

We read about the Last Supper in John 13.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God. It was with that inner strength he faced the horrors of the Cross – and as he died, said "It is finished."

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

As we take the bread now, let us give thanks that Jesus died for our salvation personally – and for the salvation of this world through the infinite power of his death and resurrection.

After supper he took the cup, saying “This cup is the new covenant in my blood: do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

As we take the cup now let us receive again his forgiving and refreshing grace, to enable us to live with his victory over sin, and all evil authority that would hold us down.

Open the Eyes of Our Hearts

Chorus

Open the eyes of our hearts Lord
Open the eyes of our hearts
We want to see You
We want to see You

Verse

To see You high and lifted up
Shining in the light of Your glory
Pour out Your power and love
As we sing holy holy holy

Bridge

Holy holy holy
Holy holy holy
Holy holy holy
I want to see You

CCLI Song # 2298355

Paul Baloche

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You'll Come

Intro

Chains be broken lives be healed
Eyes be opened Christ is revealed
(REPEAT)

Verse 1

I have decided I have resolved
To wait upon You Lord
My Rock and Redeemer shield and reward
I'll wait upon You Lord

Pre-Chorus
As surely as the sun will rise
You'll come to us
Certain as the dawn appears

Chorus
You'll come let Your glory fall
As You respond to us
Spirit rain
Flood into our thirsty hearts again
You'll come You'll come

Verse 2
We are not shaken we are not moved
We wait upon You Lord
Mighty deliverer triumph and truth
We wait upon You Lord

Pre-Chorus
As surely as the sun will rise
You'll come to us
Certain as Your word endures

Bridge
Chains be broken lives be healed
Eyes be opened Christ is revealed
(REPEAT)

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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!