

**Kogarah Uniting Church**  
**Lent 2 – Through the Night**  
**5.03.2023 @ 10am**

**Welcome**

**Acknowledgement of Country**

**We acknowledge that this land is God’s land, and God’s Spirit dwells here. We pay our respects to the elders, past, present and emerging of the Biddegal and Gweagal people of the Eora Nation who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. This land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal Land.**

- **Lighting the Christ Candle**

**God is here!**

***God is always here!***

**God is with us!**

***God is always with us!***

**Call to worship**

Come into the wilderness.

Step into the unknown possibility that is here in this place with all of our questions.

The sun might be shining but it still feels bleak.

We step into the wilderness because we have questions and it is here that it feels safe to ask what we long to know.

We come together to find deeper understanding of God’s love.

**Sing: *God of Day and God of Darkness* Marty Haugen**

**[https://youtu.be/oUVK\\_i4orjM](https://youtu.be/oUVK_i4orjM)**

**God of day and God of darkness,  
now we stand before the night;  
as the shadows stretch and deepen,  
come and make our darkness bright.**

**All creation still is groaning  
for the dawning of your might,  
when the Sun of peace and justice  
fills the earth with radiant light.**

**Still the nations curse the darkness,  
still the rich oppress the poor;  
still the earth is bruised and broken  
by the ones who still want more.**

**Come and wake us from our sleeping,  
so our hearts cannot ignore,  
all your people lost and broken,  
all your children at our door.**

**Show us Christ in one another,  
make us servants strong and true;  
give us all your love of justice,  
so we do what you would do.**

**Let us call all people holy,  
let us pledge our lives anew,**

**make us one with all the lowly,  
let us all be one in you.**

**You shall be the path that guides us,  
you the light that in us burns;  
shining deep within all people,  
yours the love that we must learn,  
for our hearts shall wander restless  
'til they safe to you return;  
finding you in one another,  
we shall all your face discern.**

**Gentle Father, Loving Mother,  
Jesus: Brother, Saviour, Friend;  
Spirit of all grace and power,  
may we praise you without end.  
Grant us all a peaceful resting,  
let each mind and body mend,  
so we rise refreshed tomorrow,  
hearts renewed to kingdom tend.**

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### **Opening prayer**

**God of night and of day,  
we dare to venture out into the unknown –**

to the edge of the wilderness where you will guide us.

We come to be led and encouraged.

We come to find answers to questions we didn't even know we had.

We come to find you, steadfast and true.

Amen.

### **Prayer of confession**

Looking out into the wild possibility of this moment, O God,

it feels like an impassable mountain or a vast, deepening sea hindering our way forward.

***Sing: Hold us in your grace O God***

**Hold us in your grace, O God,**

**hold us in your grace.**

**Hold us in your grace, O God,**

**hold us in your grace.**

***Hold us, hold us in your grace.***

***Hold us, hold us in your grace.***

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We feel discouraged and overwhelmed.

We don't move from where we are.

You know our hearts, O God, and the disbelief that has come to live there.

You know how the bleakness of this night immobilizes us.

***Sing: Hold us in your grace, O God***

We are timid. We fear failure.

We confess fear of dying even if it is for the sake of truly living.

***Sing: Hold us in your grace, O God***

**Amen.**

### **Words of affirmation**

Beloved, the God who calls us to take bold steps outward,  
is the One who journeys closely within.

In God, there is companionship and renewed strength through the wilderness  
of every night.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

***Sing: See I make all things new! Trish Watts/Monica O'Brien AOV 7***

***See I make all things new,  
new as night turns to morning.***

***The spirit is calling: "I'm with you; I make all things new."***

**The rivers are bursting with life,  
the stars in the night sky sing praise.  
Come to me in joy, come to me in song.**

**All of creation rejoice!**

***See I make all things new,  
new as night turns to morning.***

***The spirit is calling: "I'm with you; I make all things new."***

**Trust in the promise of life;  
colour the earth with my love.**

**Come to me in joy; come to me in song.**

**Open your hearts, rejoice!**

***See I make all things new,  
new as night turns to morning.***

***The spirit is calling: "I'm with you; I make all things new."***

***See I make all things new,  
new as night turns to morning.***

***The spirit is calling: "I'm with you; I make all things new."***

***The spirit is calling: "I'm with you; I make all things new."***

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#### **Affirmation of faith**

Look to the wildness of the hills!  
From where does our help come?

**Our help comes from God,  
who made heaven and Earth;  
who sustains the universe, keeping the sun in place and  
the moon on track;  
who provides sunshine and shade to nurture and protect  
life, day and night.**

Look to the skies!

From where does our help come?

**Our help comes from God,  
who showed such immense love for us in the person of  
Jesus Christ;  
who came not to judge or condemn anyone but to give  
eternal life.**

Look around!

From where does our help come?

**Our help comes from God,**

**whose Spirit is always at our side;  
whose presence is like the wind,  
powerful, unpredictable, yet personal,  
stirring us into new possibilities and bringing about  
new birth.**

## **Pass the Peace of Christ**

### **Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures**

#### ***Psalm 121***

**1I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?**

**2My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

**3He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.**

**4He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**5The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.**

**6The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**

**7The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.**

**8The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and  
forevermore.**

**Sing: *Going out and coming in* (Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan)**

**My help and hope who never slumbers  
You who made the earth and heavens  
I lift my eyes up to the mountains  
You're my help and hope to come.  
You're my help and hope to come.**

**Refrain:**

**Be my keeper as I'm moving  
for I am close to someplace deeper  
As you've held this world forever,  
Be my keeper Be my keeper.**

**O Source of Life, my soul is longing  
Catch me now for I am falling  
Oh, be my shade in sunshine burning  
Be my comfort in the night,  
Be my comfort in the night.**

**Refrain:**

**O Heart of Love, you have sustained me  
from before my birth and always  
You've been with me for all my journeys  
Help and hope, O Source of Life,  
Help and hope, O Source of Life.**

**Refrain:**

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please. Verse tune: O Shenandoah, traditional American folk.**



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### ***Genesis 12:1-4a***

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him

### **Readings from the Christian Scriptures**

#### ***Romans 4:1-5, 13-17***

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

### ***John 3:1–17***

**3**Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. **2**He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” **3**Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” **4**Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” **5**Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. **6**What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7**Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ **8**The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” **9**Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” **10**Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? **11**“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. **12**If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? **13**No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14**And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15**that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. **16**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. **17**“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

#### **Offering:**

#### **Dedication of the Offering**

We bring you gifts, O God, with all our questions.

We know that you will work wonders with all we offer to  
renew the bleakness with new wonders.

Amen.

## Reflection

Karoline Lewis

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**John 3:16. Perhaps the most well-known Bible verse and yet also one of the most destructive — an assertion of exclusion rather than one of God’s abundant love. A verse that sends people to hell rather than voice God’s extravagant grace.**

**It’s quite extraordinary when you put a bible verse back into its context. Last time I checked, 3:17 follows 3:16. Yet, the sweeping claim of John 3:16 without 3:17 has in our general parlance become that which justifies damnation for unbelievers, perpetuates our myopic musings about God, and validates our hubris. Rather than signal God’s desire to be in relationship with all people, this verse has become a weapon in the arsenal used to fight the battle for a doctrine of salvation foreign to John.**

**Yes, God will save you if you believe in Jesus. But if you don’t? Not so much. We forget that statements like this portray a kind of God I suspect, if pushed, we’d rather not have. We forget that our certainties about salvation lead to or come from claims about God that might not even reflect the God we know, the God we want.**

**God loves the world is not a theory for salvation. It is specific. Particular. As particular as the incarnation itself. God loves a Samaritan woman. God loves a man paralyzed his entire life. God loves a man blind from birth. God loves Jesus’ friend dead in the tomb for four days. God loves Peter who will deny his discipleship.**

**Often, preaching is a corrective, and this Sunday may very well demand such an educative act. Now is the time to preach John 3:16 for all it's worth. For those fearful of deportation. For our transgender sisters and brothers singled out as criminals. For those of races other than white. For women who continue to march. For our Jewish brothers and sisters hated once again for their loyalty to the God of Israel, our God. For our Muslim brothers and sisters vilified for devotion and obedience. For the world, the cosmos, that wonders who will protect it.**

**Every single person sitting in our pews is a theologian. We need to know this. Now more than ever. We need to be affirmed in our ability to give witness to the God in which we believe. We need to be empowered in making sense of our world through the lens of God. We need to know that we can indeed testify to the God we know, even in the face of those who profess a God we might not recognize. Not for the sake of argument. Not for the sake of winning some biblical war. Can't we be over that already? But for the sake of invested exchange and understanding. For the sake of dialogue and learning. For the sake of real conversations about faith.**

**We are responsible in our worship to envisage God in ways that invite wonder and awe. Our sermons are not just based on the Bible, but model biblical interpretation. Our worship should show that engagement with Scripture is not about who's right or who's wrong but discovering in it what matters for them. If we are not doing all of this in our reflections, we neglect this at our peril.**

**In other words, our preaching needs to be more about doing theology, rather than imparting theology. More about how to look for God's activity in our lives instead of asserting that God is. Yes, assertions of God's acts are foundational for how we anticipate God will act in our lives. But if assertions are left as truths alone,**

**they do nothing but suggest that theology is simply random statements about God.**

**Lent is just such a time to push our theological imagination. To encourage theological thinking. Why? Because Lent is such a time when God makes the least sense of all.**

**We need to be empowered through an invitation to witness to what it means in our lives that God loved the world. To be empowered with words about God's love so that others might see God at work in us. To be empowered to believe that we are indeed theologians — and that God needs us for John 3:16 to be the promise that it is.**

**Karoline**

**Sr Joan Chittister** A Benedictine Sister of Erie, Pennsylvania, Joan Chittister is a best-selling author and well-known international lecturer on topics of justice, peace, human rights, women's issues and contemporary spirituality in the church and in society. She presently serves as the co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, a partner organization of the United Nations, facilitating a worldwide network of women peace builders, especially in the Middle East

**Video of Sr Joan Chittister**

**[https://youtu.be/qe\\_-WrgmiTc](https://youtu.be/qe_-WrgmiTc)**

**Announcements**

**Prayers of the people**

**We come to you, O God, in the bleakness of our doubt,  
when questions arise,  
and we are sure where to find our strength.**

**We pray for your blessing in our boldness to dare to give**

**voice to so many questions.**

**We want to know so much,**

**and it is hard to challenge the voices that deride, put down, and condemn our wondering.**

**We listen for the wind to blow,**

**to hear its sound howling through our souls with understanding and grace.**

**O God, we are newborns in our hope and confusion.**

**Hear the deep yearnings of our heart, O God!**

**Open in us the ways of genuine compassion.**

**We live in a world of stark and confusing contrasts: beauty and ugliness, generosity and impoverishment, hope and despair, honesty and deception.**

**We turn to you, seeking in the stillness – the refuge and gift of silence –**

**your presence, calm, beckoning voice and renewing perspective.**

**Guide us in our prayer, strengthen us in our action for this our community, nation and world (silence).**

**In the faith, hope, and love of Christ, we pray, Amen.**

**We pray specifically today for Greg McKay, our Presbytery Treasurer. Guide him in his support for the churches of our Presbytery and for the treasurers who work so hard for their congregations.**

**Hold in your loving arms all those who are sick, lonely, depressed and grieving whom we name in our hearts.**

**Sing; • Sing; • TiS 691 Faith will not grow from words alone  
Faith will not grow from words alone,  
from proofs provided, scripture known;  
our faith must feel its way about,  
and live with question-marks and doubt.**

**The pattern Jesus showed, we share:  
life comes through death, hope through despair.  
God is made known in brokenness,  
and faith feeds on God's emptiness.**

**The church still tells how Jesus came  
through death to glorious life again –  
the strangest story! Yet, maybe,  
our faith will thrive on mystery.**

**Faith takes the little that we know,  
and calls for hope, and tells us: Go!  
Love and take courage, come what may;  
Christ will be with us on the way.**

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## **Blessing**

The wildness of night can feel endless and so lonely,  
but the wind blows, and the Spirit moves again.

Know that the sun will not hurt you by day, nor the moon  
by night,

for God will protect you and watch over you, this day and  
always.

**Exit Song:** *(Video)* ***We are not alone*** (Jim Stratheer) (Lenten songs)

<https://youtu.be/HEdQOKqV4wA>

**We are not alone.**

**We are never alone.**

**God is always with us.**

**We are not alone.**

**We are not alone.**

**We are never alone.**

**God is always with us.**

**We are not alone.**

**Through the darkest night,**

**Through the darkest night,**

**God will be our beacon,**

**Through the darkest night.**



**When we lose our way,  
When we lose our way,  
God will always lead us,  
When we lose our way.**

**God will help us stand,  
God will help us stand,  
We will find our courage,  
God will help us stand.**

**God will help us stand,  
God will help us stand.  
We will find our courage.  
God will help us stand.**

**We are not alone.  
We are never alone.  
God is always with us.  
We are not alone,**