

Worship in a box 2020

Uniting Earth

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Get Outside

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Introduction

Fifteen years ago Jason started a worshipping community in Adelaide which met outside each week, to see how meeting out in creation, out amongst all of life, could enhance our relationship with the God of all Life.

The original six-week series, open to all, became a regular gathering of mostly Christians, most of them ex church attenders.

The liturgy was kept relatively open, so that in the individual prayers and reflection, and in the sharing times people could share their own faith journey or insights, and encourage each other in theirs. It was also intended to give space for God to speak directly to people through all the living things around them, which live and breathe and have their being in God. The strong focus on what the story of evolution had to say to the church gave way over time to a more general connection with creation. <http://ecofaith.org/oldsite/ecofaithcommunity>

This is an adaptation for online use, of the original six-week liturgy, which itself constantly evolved in response to the needs of the group and the wider context.

Ideally you want people to take their phones or laptops outside. If that isn't possible, there is a ten minute section where people go outside, or look out a window before regathering.

There are no responsive sections, just a time for sharing, so one person can print the liturgy and guide the others.

Of course, adapt it freely.

You can access the five-minute reflections from the original book if you search for [B000JONMEY](https://www.amazon.com.au/B000JONMEY) on amazon.com.au Two Easter reflections are included at the end of the liturgy for people to read if you prefer, and several video links are provided in the liturgy.

Ritual	Comment
<p>Call to worship</p> <p>The Aboriginal nations lived here with the Creator for tens of thousands of years before Abraham was even born. God was here long before even them; within and amongst the creatures of Australia.</p> <p>So come you creatures of Australia! Open your ears, eyes, noses, tongues and touch to the God of life- around, amongst and within you.</p>	<p>All Australian Christianity must deal with the existence of humans whose religion predates Jesus' birth by tens of thousands of years. Evolution further shrinks the Christian story (and human story) into a tiny part of the story of God and life. God's experience of life, and love of life, predates humanity by billions of years. God is not human!</p>
<p>Opening prayer</p> <p>God of 70,000, million million million stars and countless planets. We give thanks for your love of ours. God of all the millions of species here around us, We give thanks for your love of ours.</p> <p>You are welcome here. We pray for a sense of your presence here amongst us, and an openness to what you have to say to us this morning.</p>	<p>We are a small story of life on our planet, and our planet is a small part of the story of God and the universe. God is way out there beyond us and our control or comprehension, <i>and also</i> right here with us. Cosmology humbles us, our experience reassures us.</p>

<p>Contemplation</p> <p>“God is love, (hands at sternum, reach up, around, down and back in a heart shape)</p> <p>the world is loved, (hands out and around in a horizontal circle, back to heart)</p> <p>I am loved, (hands stay on heart)</p> <p>help me love (hands from heart, outwards, fingers spread)</p>	<p>Yeeeesh! Combining movement with prayer is a bit out there for this Anglo private school boy! But after six years of God school I had to admit that, once you let yourself move into it, and forget about who might be walking past in the park, it does engage us in prayer at a deep level.</p>
<p>Welcome to the group</p> <p>Aboriginal Calendar</p> <p>The description refers to the Kurna calendar of the Adelaide plains. You can find more at http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/</p> <p>The only NSW one is D'harawal.</p> <p>From April-June,</p> <p>“This is MArrai’gang time, as the wet becomes cool. Quolls are seeking their mates, and the lillypilly ripens.”</p> <p><i>Ask people to share what they know about what happens (or used to happen) at this time of year.</i></p>	<p>Why do we cling to a four season calendar in Australia? We followed a Kurna calendar. Aboriginal calendars start when the season starts, not a specified day, so we had to be in tune with actual season in the park to note the transitions. I would have loved to create our own calendar, which reflected all the introduced plants where we worship as well as the Kurna six season year. Time of bindies. Time of rosella eggs etc.</p>

Prayer option 1: Intercession

Invite people to face North, with their arms open and relaxed, or imagine a place to the north.

The prayer is very open-ended. We used it silently, which would probably work best online too. Give people as long as you can, so they can really pray. We usually did about a minute each direction.

You invite people to pray about whatever they know is going on to the north of them.

“God hear our prayers, and speak to us of the North.”

Then invite people to turn West, South, East in sequence.

Invite people to face the monitor, maybe even hold hand out to the monitor, and prayer for the group

Invite people to hold their own heart, and pray for themselves.

Prayer option 2: open prayer

Invite people to face East, this represents the past, where the sun rose.

Invite them to give thanks for something from the past (perhaps a special Easter)

Facing North is the present. What are they thankful for now?

West is the future- what is coming up that they are thankful for?

South is the far future, when they are gone.

What will people be thankful for, about their life?

Then face the monitor, a moment to be thankful for the group.

And holding their own hands, what are they thankful for about themselves/their bodies?

More prayer which uses and engages us with the environment in which we worship. We went on to use the “four directions” in all kinds of ways. See later in the book.

People may intercede, pray for themselves, repent, give thanks etc.

It wasn't just about praying for each direction, but also listening to what God was saying to us, God's hands and feet, about each direction, the group, and ourselves.

Instead of thankfulness you could use “think of a person” from the past etc. or leave it really open “pray about the past, pray about the present”

<p>A reading of some kind</p>	<p>Often a bible story, and a children’s book, to include them and to help adults engage at a different, usually more emotional, level.</p>
<p>Five-ish minute “input”</p> <p>There are two Easter time reflections from Worshipping Evolution’s God pasted at the end of this liturgy. Or you could use these as a discussion starter:</p> <p>2 two minute poem: Jason John on climate change, politics and faith: https://youtu.be/2GUNLmVHAow</p> <p>7 mins Jason John: Ge 1, Ge 2 and other ways of understanding humanity: https://youtu.be/ETniiHdtSr4</p> <p>8mins Christianity and vegetarianism: https://youtu.be/lkU9OURGkJ8</p> <p>Some on our connection to Creation are:</p> <p>7 mins Ray Minniecon: https://youtu.be/svqmCYRiFj8</p> <p>8 mins Byron Smith: https://youtu.be/t3EM0uPTTBs</p>	<p>Input was kept to 5-10 mins so that people who don’t particular engage with the reflection, or totally disagree with it, aren’t overwhelmed or too alienated (especially as the first six in the part dealt specifically with Evolution and Christianity.</p> <p>The input is meant to stimulate discussion and drive people to reflect on their faith journey, not tell them what the journey should be.</p>
<p>A moment of silence pondering the input and listening to the sounds around us</p>	<p>It’s never silent in a park. This should be relabelled: <i>A moment of humans shutting up.</i></p>

Contemplation 2

Invite people to leave their devices, and wander off to somewhere they can contemplate other living things and pray for ten minutes. If they can, ask them to collect something (a leaf, fallen flower, stick, rock) which strikes their eye to bring back to the group.

When the time is up, go around the circle sharing

It's Really important to say this:

“This is a time of sharing. So I will be asking people to say what is on their heart, as briefly as we can. Then there is to be no comment from others, either positive or negative. It isn't the time to discuss yet, just to share, and to really listen. If someone says something you really want to follow up, you can do that later.

After each person speaks, we will simply thank them.”

If people don't know each other well, get them to start by saying their name and what brought them here.

They might offer any reflection they have sparked by the day's gathering, and perhaps talk about the object and why they chose it.

The group responds with “thankyou, (name)”

The meditative wander, and the use of objects, created some non-rational stimulation, and was a very rich source of reflection.

If people didn't want to share deeply, they had the option of just saying their name and something easy. Deep sharing is an invitation not an embarrassing requirement. We found, though, that there was *a lot* of it, which was great.

More prayer

Another minute of silent prayer for the group, or in response to things we heard in the group.

The above walking prayer, and this silent prayer, give space for people to relate to God and Jesus as *they* know them.

Sending out

A God who is unseen, unheard, untouched, unsmelt and untasted is no God to us.

So this week let us have ears to hear, eyes to see, and let us taste and see that God is good.

Go in peace as part of life, into the loving presence of the God of life:

beyond us,

one with us/of us,

amongst and within us.

We can find God anytime, not just Sunday mornings. If God is in all and through all, if life is the image of God (see below), then we should be able to experience God everywhere.

“one with us” includes but doesn’t require Trinitarian faith. Using “who became one of us” is more strongly Trinitarian, but with more appropriate labels.

*If you are using this around Easter time, you might like to read this reflection, from *Worshipping Evolutions' God* ([B00OJONMEY on Amazon.com.au](https://www.amazon.com.au/B00OJONMEY)).*

Or, given that people are online, you could just read the callout box, below, as a discussion started.

Easter: Jesus' and Jeremiah's alternative to the old covenant

In Mark's story, Jesus, having just cleared the temple court, and declared that the time of the temple was coming to an end, said,

"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; *so that* your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

Jesus went on to speak of the two great commandments,

"The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Later, at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

Some of those there were really miffed, claiming the luxury should have been sold for the poor. Jesus disagreed, and had a dig at them about their ability to help the poor whenever they felt like it. Finally, Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.

How do we win God's forgiveness? The most common answer I hear, and see on the web, and read in hymns at Easter is often that it is given to us, through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, the lamb of God, the fulfilment of all the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament.

The New Covenant, sealed with Jesus' sacrificial blood.

And this traditional answer has more than enough support in the scriptures to justify itself.

But I also think alternative views have plenty in scripture to justify *them*. For starters, we have four gospels, and they say different, though overlapping, things about Jesus.

Some New Testament writers clearly claim that Jesus was a sacrifice. This made sense in their context, where the sacrifices of other animals were thought by many to restore favour with God (but not by Jeremiah, Amos, or Micah). A Pharisee might be persuaded that God had swapped animal sacrifices for Jesus' one perfect sacrifice, but would Jeremiah be persuaded? Are we?

This year the church is reading through Mark (very selectively), so what does Jesus say here, and in Mark generally?

He didn't say "I will die so that God may forgive you." No. He said, "*You* forgive others, so that God may forgive you."

There's a whole sermon there about why can't God just forgive us anyway, and is salvation therefore by works (the work of forgiving others) but for today let's concentrate on this bit-
You forgive others so God can forgive you!

And it's not just Mark who records this, but also Matthew and Luke.

In Mark, Jesus doesn't have anything to do with our forgiveness, or with the offer God is making, apart from *declaring the path* to forgiveness and being willing to die rather than keep silent about it.

Luke agrees, recording Jesus as saying,

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

We forgive to be forgiven. Jesus *declares* the path to forgiveness, he doesn't create it. He declares that we will have the courage to declare the same path, and live it, when the Spirit comes upon us. God's work is scary work, and we need God's help to do it.

It's such a simple path- and such a hard one for anyone who has ever tried to forgive!!

We continue to hear Jesus' simple message: the two great commandments, again recorded in Matthew and Luke- Love God. Love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus doesn't even say we need to love him.

Easy. Hard. Jesus seems to have laid before us a simple, gracious path, which is really, really difficult!

There was never any need for animal sacrifice, nor did Jesus sacrifice himself to appease God on our behalf.

The path to salvation is love and the forgiveness which flows from that. And we need a gracious spirit which lets us accept the things people do when they do them from good motivation, even if we would have done it differently.

Forgive, love, be gracious.

Be like God. Easy heh?

Jesus could have sidestepped the issues, returned to Nazareth and potted in the shed; supported his mother as she grew older.

He could have stayed with his friends at Bethany, had a good weekend, discussed, philosophised, solved the world's problems over a BBQ and wine.

He could have 'gone bush', into the wilderness, become a hermit, grown wise, specialised in prophecy.

He could have done a deal with the authorities, played their game, toed the line become a respected politician.

But he took the risky option.

Myself -1 would have been more careful, more measured, after all, 30 is the prime of life.

There's so much to do

a career to be considered

advancement to be negotiated

the world to travel

a family to support

a mortgage to service

leisure to be enjoyed

health to be maintained

But Jesus rode into Jerusalem, confronted the 'powers that be', spoke his mind, followed through his teachings with dynamic action.

And, he lost the popular vote
lost his freedom
lost friends and family
lost his future
lost his life.

But his story endures and inspires. He proved the world can be changed by an ordinary life put on the line, by clear priorities, fearless action for social justice, and a deep caring for the world in which we live.

So, it is Easter once again, and we plead, 'Jesus, save us'.

Save us from selling God short,

selling our world short,

selling ourselves short.

May our eyes be wide open, our ears attuned to every heartbeat, our lives primed with the courage to love. *Kerry White*