

The Sacrament of Empty Hands

The Sacrament of Empty Hands – with Easter season options

Prepared by Rev. Amelia Koh-Butler of the Uniting Church in Australia – current Chaplain for the University of Western Sydney.

The following Liturgy follows the pattern of the Mass, Holy Communion, Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Eucharist, and allows for the absence of consecrated bread and wine/juice – while retaining familiar foundations, in uncertain times...

This is not a replacement for Gathering as God's People, embodied in community, but provides a way of people gathering around stories of hope from despair and resurrection after death.

It is envisaged this material could be used for people in homes, possibly connected digitally or across distances. Some planned gathering in Australia will use the material over internet, by phone or from balconies across courtyards.

This liturgy is offered, as a gift of prayer and solidarity from God's People in Australia to the rest of an anxious and hurting world. Together, may we be God's Humanity.

Setting:

- *An empty cup or glass and An empty plate are placed on a celebratory cloth (either white or many coloured).*
- *A handkerchief or tissue covers both the cup/glass and plate.*

Any or all of the following symbols may be added from week to week, or you may build these up to a collection over time:

- *Symbol 1 - An unlit candle is placed inside a glass or transparent vase or holder. It is also on the cloth or nearby.*
- *Symbol 2 – A symbol for prayer is placed alongside the other symbols. This may be a cross, a stone with a heart drawn on it, or a wooden heart.*
- *Symbol 3 – Photos of absent friends or loved ones or a regular place of worship.*
- *Symbol 4 – A Globe or small map of the world.*

TENEBRAE/MAUNDY THURSDAY PREFACE (Option 1)

No longer at the Temple,
Jesus met with his disciples in a home.
I have longed to celebrate this feast with you.

Tonight, we take time to meet with mystery,
Uncertain of the unfolding story,
familiar, yet strange.
In absence, be present.

In faith, we dedicate time to be set aside,

To honour God's story and pray with one another.
We come to this unexpected table, waiting upon God.

EASTER ACCLAMATION (Option 2)

Christ is Risen!
He is Risen indeed!

[Option – light the candle]

Look – the Church is Empty!
Where can Our Lord be found?
He is not here.
He is Risen!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

A CALL TO WORSHIP FOR DISPERSED PEOPLE (Option 1)

**We are connected by God's Spirit,
hoping for a glimpse of the holy:**

the One who brooded over Creation
who engulfed a bush in flame
who made a path through the waters
who rolled away the tombstone

**We are connected by God's Spirit,
hoping for a whisper of the truth:**

the Word who first spoke in the silence
the voice who raged with prophet's zeal
the host who sang of peace on earth
the teacher who blessed humble and poor

**We are connected by God's Spirit,
hoping for a touch of compassion:**

the tenderness that shaped the human body
the caress that opened eyes of the blind
the soothing hand that brought healing calm
the warmth that embraced lonely and lost

**We are connected by God's Spirit,
in the presence of mystery:**

of One who is

revealed and hidden,
known and unknown
mother and father of Creation
human God-with-us
living Word
eternal Spirit
Three and One

**Breathe into us
hope, faith and joy
Breathe into us
compassion, truth and holiness
Breathe into us
reconciliation, justice and peace
Breathe newness of life
as we worship today
in this place and in many places
joined by your Spirit of comfort and hope**

Amen

© Craig Mitchell, 2020

A CALL TO WORSHIP FOR AN ONLINE COMMUNITY (Option 2)

**The One who created every physical cell
and every aspect of energy calls us together now -**

From before time, God created the lands and waters,
given into the care of the people.

[Insert the Name of the traditional custodians of the Land]

We honour and respect those who have cared for the lands we are on,
now being woven together in this new sharing of story.

Across times and places,
God has moved and continues to move,
enlivening us with breath and vibrancy.

**The Word who gave life before words were formed
sings to us now -**

the buzz of feedback reminds us of continuing creation and the promise of completion,
the flicker of image reminds us of past, present and future, being stitched together from
beyond time,
the wonder of time and place testifies to the One of all times and places.

The Community of God,
Creator, Redeemer and Comforter,
draws us in... into the heart of God,
to find comfort, rest, courage and home.

Come, Holy One – draw us into you!

© Craig Mitchell, 2020

WORDS FROM SCRIPTURE

*[This sample liturgy incorporates the Easter Sunday Readings.
Substitute other readings as required.]*

We read from the prophet Jeremiah, Chapter 31, verses 1-6

31:1 At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.

31:2 Thus says the LORD: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest,

31:3 the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

31:4 Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

31:5 Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit.

31:6 For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God." (NRSV)

THE PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

The people may exchange a sign of the peace by using a nod or hands-together 'namaste'-style gesture, with words such as 'Christ's peace be with you,' 'the peace of God' or simply 'Peace' or 'Shalom'.

PEACE SONG

We join with people across different continents and cultures, traditions and languages in our desire for peace and harmony...

Peace, Salaam, Shalom

<https://youtu.be/IBQ-KsGo BI>

IKARA – A MEETING PLACE STORY

Ikara is the Adnyamathanha name for Wilpena Pound, meaning meeting place. The beautiful Flinders Ranges in South Australia is also known as Ikara-Flinders and there is a National Park there. This story is shared in the book by Rev Denise Champion (an Adnyamathanha woman) and Rosemary Dewerse, *Yarta Wandatha (The Land is Speaking. The People are Speaking)*.

Aramburra (the trapdoor spider) and Artapudapuda (the grub) have a conversation. They talk about what happens to the body after death. They talk... again and again and again.

Artapudapuda believed the body returns to the ground and that's where it stays. Aramburra believed the body returns to the ground but after three days the spirit rises.

After many conversations, they decided to make a decision. They went with Artapudapuda's version. The body would return to the ground and stay there.

After a time, they missed their loved ones. They longed for them. They yearned for them. They regretted the decision they had made.

This is why the Adnyamathanha people say the Aramburra has nothing to be ashamed of. His version of the story was good, so he can come into the open, but Artapudapuda is found under the bark of a tree because of his shame at making the wrong decision.

In a time of grief and mourning, I learnt this story from my sister, Denise. It teaches me I have a choice of understanding ending and now is the time for me to choose how I will live the rest of my life. I choose the resurrection story. (AKB)

PREPARATION

The cup and plate are uncovered.

INVITATION

This earth is not our earth.

This is God's earth.

This time is not my time.

This is God's time.

This table is not my table.

This is God's table.

God's earth, God's time, God's table...

It is God who provides this feast of place and time and community.

Provision is already made for us all to be part of God's story.

God longs for us to be at home with God and one another.

Place your hand on the table or the wall, set your feet on the floor,

Recognise these spaces as being of God and for God

for everything we have comes from the One source of all that is.

In this time, we rededicate ourselves and our surroundings for God's good purposes.

THANKSGIVING PRAYER

The Lord is with us.

We lift our hearts to God.

We give thanks to God.

For God not only created the earth and heavens,
but all things that have lived and will yet live.
Saints from ages past and those who are yet to come,
join with us in the here and now,
linked in miraculous ways.
The stories, described by prophets and saints
of past, present and future, dance together
in reflection of God's own glory,
for all Life has an Author.

The Author became known in the Word,
the One who came as Emmanuel, God with us,
born as One with us, living among us,
teaching, healing, weeping and sharing with us.
Living the life of Compassion and Justice,
The Word was rejected by the world and executed...

Christ has died.

We hear again the story in the Gospel of John, Chapter 20, verses 1-18

Reader 1

20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

20:2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Reader 2

20:3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.

20:4 The two were running together,
but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

20:5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there,
but he did not go in.

20:6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.
He saw the linen wrappings lying there,

20:7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head,
not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

20:8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in,
and he saw and believed;

20:9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture,
that he must rise from the dead.

20:10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Reader 1

20:11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;

20:12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus

had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

20:13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

20:14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

20:15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).

20:17 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

20:18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Christ's coming again has begun
in the unfolding story of the Spirit of God,
in the continual seeding of new spiritual life in every age and place.

We see the work of the Spirit in the service and self-sacrifice of so many.
We hear the song of the Spirit when people sing on balconies.
We breathe the breath of the Spirit, knowing some are breathing
through the creativity of digital photocopying and scientific imagination.
We wonder at our coming into a spiritual age previously unknown.

Yet, our story, is grounded in the story of Jesus of Nazareth...

NARRATIVE OF INSTITUTION

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread,
and after giving thanks to God,
he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, saying:
This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood,
shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup
you proclaim the death of the risen Lord, until he comes.

SHARING

In this empty plate/basket [*lift and show*],
we choose to see the world's hunger.
We remember that millions of people, this day,
lack bread for Communion, bread for breakfast, bread for life.
We acknowledge that we ourselves hunger, this day,
in ways that no earthly bread can satisfy.

Hospitable God,
**meet us in our unmet hungers –
and help us to put our abundance
at the service of the poor.**

In this empty cup [*lift and show*],
we choose to see the world's thirst.
We remember that millions of people, this day,
lack wine for Communion, fruit for juicing, water for life.
We acknowledge that we ourselves thirst, this day,
in ways that no earthly cup can quench.

Hospitable God,
**meet us in our unmet thirsts –
and help us to put our fullness
at the service of the empty.**

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.' (Matthew 5:6)
In the name of Christ, Amen.

INVOCATION

Pour out the Holy Spirit on this empty plate/basket, this empty cup, that they may be for us
– even in their emptiness – the body and blood of Christ.

... so that we may take his Life into our lives, and be taken and blessed, broken and given
for the world.

LORD'S PRAYER

PLATE and CUP

We hold up the empty plate...

It is Christ who is the bread of life,
Who satisfies the hungry heart.

We hold up the empty cup...

It is Christ who is the cup of hope,
Who revives the thirsty.

The plate and cup are placed on the table...

The gifts of God
for the people of God.

In faith and hope, we hold out our empty hands...
**In these empty vessels and in our empty hands,
we celebrate the mystery and wonder of the empty tomb.**

In our hands and in our hearts,
we leave space for resurrection,
for new life, for new meaning.
We hold the sorrows, prayers and hopes of the world before You, O God.

[intercessions may be shared]

May Your Spirit flow among us and beyond us,
drawing us into loving and caring for Your world.

Jesus Christ is Risen!
He is Risen indeed!

WORDS OF MISSION and COMMISSION IN PLACE

**We shall not seek God among the dead.
We shall be bearers of hope among the living.
We shall carry the stories of our hurts and losses
that we may tell the story of healing and resurrection.**

Live then, in the promise of Resurrection Life!
Live according to the story of the One:
Creator, Redeemer and Spirit,
[alt: Father, Son and Spirit]
Knowing that the scattered community of God
is placed in the world,
for the sake of the world.

**Glory to God
and Peace to All.**

ALLELUIA

AMEN.

*Wherever you are in the world, it is our prayer that this is a moment of comfort and hope.
Be of good courage.*

Sources:

A Call to Worship for a Dispersed Community – © Craig Mitchell, 2020, Used with permission.

A Call to Worship for an Online Community – © Amelia Koh-Butler, 2020, Used with permission.

Sections of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (Sharing and Invocation) - Claire Wright, based on *Uniting in Worship 2*, Used with permission.

Suggested Song - **Peace, Salaam, Shalom** https://youtu.be/IBQ-KsGo_BI

(Emma's Revolution. Note: several versions can be sourced on Youtube)

Scripture texts are from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, © 1989, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Yarta Wandatha (The Land is Speaking. The People are Speaking), © 2014, Denise Champion and Rosemary Dewerse

Remaining Sections – © Amelia Koh-Butler, 2020, Used with permission.

Notes:

These resources are able to be used for Worship and Devotion, with appropriate acknowledgement.

Some communities may choose to reduce the text of the provided Prayer of Thanksgiving. It may be suitable to substitute the inclusion of the Nicene Creed as a way of proclaiming the Gospel story in words familiar to those who are then connecting with other faithful of many times and places.

Remembrance and Tribute

The first time I came across this idea was some years ago, with the retirement of a lovely Ministry of the Uniting Church in Australia, Rev Beth Howard. Before moving into a retirement home, she wanted to celebrate communion... but then she developed a liturgy of empty hands. She had a big impact on my faith journey and that of my late husband many years ago... it is a reminder for us, of being a small, but important, part of a much bigger story. May we be building faith together in our dispersal right across times and places.