



Order of Service for
Sunday 19th September 2021

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

Through sun and shadow,

God's love will remain.

Through torrent and thunder,

God's love will remain.

Through fog and flurries,

God's love will remain.

Through breeze and bluster,

God's love will remain.

Through cloudless and clear,

God's love will remain.

Through rain and rainbow,

God's love will remain.

Through all that life brings,

God's love will remain.

Come, let us worship God.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

We gather in acknowledgement of the Yorta Yorta nation, the first inhabitants of this place who dwelt here and cared for the land of old.

***We gather attentive to their wonder and stories of sun, moon and stars,
and we come in commitment to the ongoing journey of reconciliation between indigenous
and non-indigenous Australians.***

HYMN TiS 187 Let all creation dance

Introduction to Seasons of Creation - Sky

The atmosphere and the sky we see surround us, cradles us, sustains us
and can be a source of wonder.

We take for granted that there should be clean air to breath.

We marvel in the blaze of stars in a night sky away from city lights.

As we worship God today we celebrate our wonder for the skies.

Psalms 19:1-6

God's Glory in Creation

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.



In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵ *which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.*

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

God, our Creator, as we look into the skies we celebrate the wonders of the worlds that surround us. Help us to see your presence in the evening sky, your spirit in the wind, your mercy in the falling rain. Teach us to hear the good news from the sky celebrating the glory of God in Earth. Rejoice with us as we behold the dawn revealing the mysteries of the skies above and Earth below. In the name of Christ who unites heaven and Earth. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

For the beauty of the Earth
desecrated by pollution, extinguished by forest fires, choked by plastic waste
Christ, our God, forgive us for systemic greed.
For the urgency of this hour
ignored by apathy or procrastination
wasted by ineffective decisions and denied by economic interests
**Christ, our God and Saviour,
forgive us for selfish short-term behaviour.**
For the joy of human love
fractured by forced migration, crushed by bereavement
lost to typhoons, floods and starvation.
Christ, our God, bringer of justice, forgive us for this climate crisis. Amen

AN EARLY WORD – *Sky Colour*

HYMN TiS 135 All things bright and beautiful

BIBLE READINGS:

Jeremiah 4:23-28

Mark 15:33-39

Philippians 2:14-18

REFLECTION

Psalm 19, which we read responsively earlier, begins with a wonderfully positive affirmation of God's creativity: *The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*

It's an exultant phrase, and reminds us that wherever we look – up or down or all around – there is always evidence of the glory of God.

We can sometimes think of the heavens as being a bit boring – all blue, but think for a moment about what's out there.

The sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the rain, the lightning, the birds of the air, even the buzzing insects that can annoy us so much, are all part of God's creative wonder.

Back in the 1990's Don and I lived in Broome for several years, and sometimes in the dry season we would become almost bored with the incessantly cloudless blue skies. Then in about November the humidity and the clouds would start building up and the rain would arrive, often preceded by strong



winds and deep grey skies. All this was beautiful in its own way. I'll never forget the times we travelled from Derby back to Broome after a late afternoon church service in Derby, accompanied by the terrifying splendour of forked lightning streaking across the night sky. Yes, we only need to look up, in daylight or darkness, to see God's glory.

I have other, more recent memories of looking up, and this time not seeing anything, because the skies and everything under them were blanketed in the haze of bushfire smoke drifting across the countryside. I'm sure you've experienced that same haze, as has most of Victoria, and we suffered not only the blotting out of God's glory but the experience of breathlessness.

Those scary moments when God's glory is blotted out, and fresh air is gone, remind us that if we humans fail to take care of God's good earth, disastrous consequences can occur which we may not be able to reverse. Sadly we can witness such consequences already. Parts of the earth are dying as humanity continues to use it without replenishing. We see pollution, eradication of natural resources, the endangering all forms of life, and constant spewing of carbon dioxide into the sky.

If we were to take the passage from Jeremiah which was read earlier, and stand it in our current context, we might see in it a gut-wrenching commentary on what our environment may come to look like:

²³ *I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;*

and to the heavens, and they had no light.

²⁵ *I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,*

and all the birds of the air had fled.

²⁶ *I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,*

and all its cities were laid in ruins.

It's a bleak vision of a desolate future.

These words were actually written, or perhaps at first spoken, in Old Testament times when the people of God were under threat from the all-conquering Babylonian invaders from the north. Jeremiah is foretelling what the result will be after the land has been plundered and stripped. But the language is so very descriptive of how land and sky might appear after being ravaged by human induced changes in climate. Through Jeremiah's words we can almost hear the earth and the sky in mourning for all that is lost.

²⁷ *For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.*

²⁸ *Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black;*

The most extreme experience of darkness and desolation in the biblical narrative has to be the response of the heavens at the moment of Jesus death on the cross. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, and at the moment when the world extinguished that life, it was plunged into darkness. It's as if the heavens themselves were weeping for all that God loved – the sky, the earth and all of creation.

Today we are celebrating sky and our relationship with that part of God's creation. Because earth and sky are intimately interconnected, what we do on earth has an impact on the sky above. Compared to many countries around the world, Australia has clear skies. However in spite of a very high standard of air quality, the Australian Academy of Science tells us that approximately 5000 people die each year due to diseases associated with exposure to air pollution in our country.

Our growing population, increased urbanisation, higher demands on transport, energy consumption and use of wood-burning heaters all contribute to higher levels of air pollution. If emissions are not reduced, data modelling indicates that there will be significant increases in summer smog after 2030, while an increase in the frequency of droughts would lead to a rise in particle air pollution as a result of more bushfires and wind-blown dust storms.

Globally, the situation is more serious. The World Health Organization reports that almost 90 per cent of people living in the world's cities are being exposed to dangerous levels of pollution. Outdoor and household air pollution causes an alarming 7 million deaths worldwide.



What can we do?

Paul had some advice for the Christians of Philippi. From Philippians chapter 2: *Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.*

Perhaps all most of us can do is continue to care as best we are able for the earth – the land, the waters and the sky. As caretakers of this planet, we are called to care for all God's creation so God's creation can flourish. We are not alone in that task. The Spirit of God, which flows around and within us like wind and fire itself, gives us new life, renewing us and sustaining us for this profound task. Thanks be to God.
Amen

Hymn: SONG OF SKY

1. Lord of suns and star exploding
Galaxies and swirling skies,
Where you chose to show your glory
Took the heavens by surprise.
Lord of solar winds and wisdom,
Super stars that blow our mind,
Choosing such a fragile planet
Hardly seems a grand design.

2. On this piece of stardust swirling,
On this spinning spot in space,
Life itself was born like music,
When you showed your hidden face.
What an honour to be chosen,
Silent planet blue and green,
Filled with glory, grace and gardens,
Where the breath of God is seen.

3. What is even more amazing
We have poisoned Earth like fools.
Help us change our way of living,
Love the Earth and love her rules.
Help us stem the tide of traders
Leaving Earth an empty store;
Join us now Creator Spirit,
Come renew your Earth once more.

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The Uniting Church in Australia
SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DEDICATION OF OFFERING

Gracious God,
we thank you for your many gifts to us:
the unfolding of day and night;
the smell of a meal being prepared;
the voice of a friend greeting us;
the feel of a cool breeze against our cheeks.
These, and so many more, fill our days.

We now offer these gifts in response
as a sign of our gratitude
and a gesture of our love. Amen

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Creator God, we lament the destruction of earth and sky.
We pray for all of the people and places that suffer because of climate change:
for communities where the air is unbreathable;
for neighbourhoods filled with the smoke and ash of wildfires;
for people who live with climate-induced despair or depression.

Creator God, show us how to step back and allow Creation to flourish;
how to reduce our carbon footprint;
how to care for Earth and sky and all creatures therein;
how to use our voices to advocate for climate action.

We continue to look to the sky, the movement of the sun, clouds, moon, and stars.
We acknowledge the mystery around us.
Receive all our prayers this day.
Hear our concerns and our dreams;
hear our deep desire to reflect your love to you, to each other, and all of creation.

We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray, saying:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.*

TiS 690 Beauty for Brokenness

Blessing

Grace to you and peace.
May the rain of kindness fall upon you.
May each cloud spark your imagination.
May the stars' light give you strength.
May the bright blue sky bring you peace.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

