



The Uniting Church in Australia  
**SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH**

Order of Service for  
Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Seasons of Creation: Mountain Sunday

## CALL TO WORSHIP

God, who creates mountains, call us to worship.

***We come with joy to your holy mountain.***

The mountains and hills burst into song:

***We join our songs of praise with theirs.***

We invite the mountains to worship with us –

***mighty boulders, sliding glaciers and chiselled peaks.***

We join with mountain creatures to praise God:

***gliding eagles, rock wallabies, Bogong moths.***

We call the depths of the mountains to celebrate:

***precious gems, volcanic lava, rich red ore, earthquakes.***

We come to the holy mountain of God today

***filled with awe by God's glorious presence.***

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We give thanks for the Bangerang Clan  
and the Yorta Yorta Nations  
who nurtured this land and the waters,  
for their stories of the Dreaming,  
for their connection with the sacred,  
for their 'yes' to creation.  
We commit ourselves to work for reconciliation.

*John van de Lara, adapted*

**HYMN** *TiS 446 Glorious things of you are spoken, / Zion, city of our God*

## INTRODUCTION - MOUNTAIN SUNDAY

From ancient times, people have revered mountains as eternal, and also as sacred, 'thin places', where their gods lived - and might perhaps be met by humans. We will reflect on mountains, not as domains to be conquered, but to be enjoyed, preserved and explored, as wonderful works of creation. And as being hugely significant in our faith story. Come to the mountains!

## PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

## WORD OF ASSURANCE



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## RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

### AN EARLY WORD



Clues U



Mt E



Clues Mt K



Mt M

### THE READINGS

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp for our feet  
***A light to our path***

<b>First Reading</b>	Isaiah 65. 17- 25	Good news from God's holy mountain
<b>Psalms Response</b>	Psalms 48. 1-11	Mt Zion, the city of God, rejoices in God's presence
<b>The Gospel</b>	Mark 16. 14-16	Good news for all creation!

Lord, may your Word live in us  
***and bear much fruit to your glory.***

### REFLECTION

From earliest times, mountains have drawn humans towards them, although they are dwarfed by towering heights. Mountains are one of the best places to get in touch with creation. Often mountains are full of mystery, especially when they are too high to be climbed. Most mountains were laid down under the sea until underground forces caused them to rise and buckle, forming magnificent mountains. Others, of course, were thrust up by immense pressure from the earth's molten centre; these are made of igneous rocks and may even be active volcanoes. Mt Fujiyama in Japan is one of these, as is the Canary Islands' one in this week's news.

Peoples in many mountainous areas thought of their highest mountain as the home of their god or gods. So you may have learnt about the twelve Greek gods including Zeus, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, who lived on Mt Olympus, Greece's highest mountain. The Romans borrowed the same mountain home for their gods, Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Mars, Mercury, Bacchus. In Tibet, In the Andes in South America and in other lands including Canaan, mountains played a central role in relation to the people's gods and worship.



So mountains often became deeply spiritual, symbols of the divine.

The Israelites, now wandering through the wilderness, found a new relationship with the God who brought them out from Egypt at Mt Sinai - sometimes called Mt Horeb. This God called their leader Moses to climb up Mt Sinai where he spent time with God, who made a covenant with God's people. This covenant was a lasting agreement between God and God's people. (Exodus 19.3-6; 20.2): 'If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession ...a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.' God's demands of the people are reflected in the Ten Words or commands God gave Moses. They set out the gospel or good news: 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt'; they explained how the people were to live because God was their God. No god beside this God, no images of God, no use of God's name 'in vain', keeping God's day holy. And further Words explaining how they were to live with other people - family, neighbours. Moses was on the mountain a long time; the smoke they people saw intensified the sense of mystery. You'll recall that when Moses came down from the mountain, he found the people worshipping a golden calf, so he broke the two stones. Later he reascended the mountain, was given new stones, was permitted to hear God's name (I AM) and to see a little of God's glory.

Is it any wonder this mountain remains a sacred place, a place of pilgrimage, for at least 2,000 years. These days many pilgrims go up the mountain in time to see the dawn and then share Communion. Our group caught a camel about 2.30am and went up to the Fifth Tea House. Much later we walked down the mountain.

Once the Israelites captured towns in Canaan, they took over the Canaanite 'high places', worshipping God there. They made their sacrifices and vows there. Think of Ramah, Megiddo, Bethel, Shiloh.

Hundreds of years later, about 970 BC, David, now King of Israel, wanted to capture a hill fortress near Jerusalem held by the Jebusites. The Israelite armies couldn't breach the walls - but some went up a water supply tunnel and got into the fortress. These nine acres surrounded by seven hills became David's City. Mt Zion, though not as high as the Mount of Olives, was soon known as God's holy mountain. Psalm 48 sings of God's presence in this mountain - 'beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth'. Zion is still known as the special place where God's Name dwelt, and which kept the Israelites safe from advancing armies and was a symbol of God's faithfulness. All this continues - although its actual site has changed twice - first to the site of the Temple Solomon built and later to the west. Once the Temple had been built, all sacrifices were made there - and worship at the 'high places' was forbidden.

Psalm 121, which we will sing later, shares the joy of Israelite pilgrims approaching Jerusalem with its hills - and Zion. We transform their actual experience to something spiritual rather than physical.

But in 586 BCE, Holy Zion was defeated by the Babylonians who took most of the people back with them. Isaiah 65 announces 'new heavens and a new earth' - a restored holy mountain where God's people will live in safety, their lives blessed. Jerusalem was rebuilt - and you can still go to Mt Zion!

Leap forward to the first century, to a mountain in the Galilee, the Mount of Transfiguration, possibly Mount Tabor. You will recall how Jesus went up the mountain with the disciples. (Mark 9.2-9) Peter, James and John were terrified at witnessing a dazzling Jesus in conversation with Moses and Elijah. Most terrifying, however, was the heavenly voice from the cloud: 'This is my Son, the Beloved: listen to him!' This event on a mountain recalls God's dazzling glory on Sinai and points forward to the glory of the Resurrection. Here, Jesus was given a renewed understanding of his Sonship. Here the disciples heard God's endorsement of Jesus as the Son of God, God's beloved. Here we again learn about mountain top experiences.



Mt Tabor, crowned by an Orthodox Church, remains a place of pilgrimage where people reflect on God's astounding endorsement of the Son, Jesus - although the Son would soon be telling his followers about arrest, trial and death - on another hill, Calvary or Golgotha.

You will find part of that hill underneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was built over two sacred Christian sites in the fourth century. Reaching down the hole and touching the rock of Golgotha on Good Friday was an indescribable experience.

Like the ancient Israelites, we know the special quality that mountains give to our lives - they give us a relationship with the cosmos, the whole created world. Mountains tend to be less damaged by humans than other parts of the planet, increasing our enjoyment. On mountain heights we are allowed to share some of the deepest spiritual insights possible - and we share these with prophets like Moses and Elijah, with apostles like Peter, James and John, and with religious leaders and saints through the ages to our own day.

And, like the disciples after the Resurrection, we are to 'go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.' Mark's words presume that God's message benefits not only humans but all that God has created. Now this is good news for the whole community of creation in which we live! Thanks be to God, who created mountains!

### **OUR RESPONSES**

**HYMN *TiS 76*** *I to the hills will lift my eyes*

### **DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING**

Generous Creator God

***use the gifts which we offer you***

***to restore your joy to those in need***

***including our fellow creatures on Planet Earth. Amen***

### **NOTICES**

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*World Council of Churches* Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Peru

*This Presbytery* Mansfield, Bonnie Doon, Tolmie; Alpine Regional Resource Ministry

God of all creation

we give thanks for all your wonders,  
especially the towering mountains  
which assure us of your presence  
and your self-revelation to the whole cosmos.

We pray for the restoration and renewing of the mountains  
where overlogging causes mudslides  
where mining causes poisoned waters which kill wild life  
where rising temperatures cause glaciers to melt  
where commercial plantations move the Indigenous and poor  
to higher, less hospitable lands  
where the mystery of God's presence is erased by human occupation



so that the wonders of your creation  
may again bring blessing to all your people.

Creator God, give us hope, grant us salvation,  
give us a new relationship with creation  
so that we reverently tend this gift from you  
and say once again of the earth and all you created  
'it is GOOD.'

*Rev Bob Kikuyu, adapted*

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

***Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name  
your kingdom come  
your will be done  
on earth as it is 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 for ever. Amen***

## BEING SENT ON GOD'S MISSION

**HYMN** *TiS 276 There's a light upon the mountains*

## BLESSING

May God bless us with wonder at creation's glory,  
may God bless us with fury at creation's spoiling,  
may God bless us with courage at this critical time

***And may the blessing of God, Father,  
Son and Holy Spirit,  
rest on us and on all creation,  
this day and for the future to come. Amen***

*ACT Alliance*

The peace of the earth be with you,  
the peace of the heavens too;  
the peace of the rivers be with you,  
the peace of the oceans too.  
Deep peace falling over you;  
God's peace growing in you.

*A Guatemalan Blessing*

## ***You might like to check***

ABC TV *Songs of Praise* Mountainous Wales (September 19)  
iView *Back to Nature* Episode 2 The High Country

## **And also some mountain heights**

Mt Everest	8,849 m	Mt Sinai	2,285 m
Mt Olympus	2918 m	Mt Nebo	802 m
Mt Fujiyama	3,776 m	Mt Zion	765 m
Mt Koscisuzsko	2,228 m	Mt Tabor	575 m
Uluru	863 m	Mt Buffalo	1,723 m
Mt Major	350 m		

