



Synod Worship Resource

This is a congregational resource designed to assist worship leaders on the Sunday of Synod. In the following Order of Service alternative approaches to parts of the Service are offered. A resource section at the end of the Service contains Bible readings in full, plus the homily, and some images that might be useful for different approaches.

THEME: Isaiah 43:19

Call to Worship

(Based on Psalm 126)

L: When our mouths are filled with laughter,

All: Come let us worship God!

L: When our tongues shout with joy,

All: Come let us worship God!

L: When we rejoice,

All: Come let us worship God!

L: When we sow in tears,

All: May our desire still be to worship God!

L: May we be a people of hope -

**All: Those who weep, and those who shout with joy,
Come worship God.**



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



Acknowledgement of Original Custodians of the Land

We acknowledge the _____ people, the first inhabitants of this place.

Insert name of First Peoples in your region of Victoria or Tasmania.

We honour them for the custodianship of the land, on which we gather today.

Hymn/Song

TIS 474 – Gather Us In

Prayer of Adoration/Thanksgiving

LEADER

Glory to you, Almighty God!
You spoke, and light came out of darkness,
order rose from confusion.

LEFT SIDE OF CHURCH

*You breathed into the dust of the earth,
and we were formed in your image.*

RIGHT SIDE OF THE CHURCH

*You looked on the work of your hands,
and declared that it was all good.*

L: And still you speak, breathe and look for us.

A: We praise you!

LEADER

Glory to you, Jesus Christ!
You met us as a refugee, a threatened child,
the Word made flesh, born in a forgotten place.

LEFT SIDE OF CHURCH

*You called us, by name, to leave what was comfortable,
to be your disciples, companions and friends.*

RIGHT SIDE OF THE CHURCH

*You saved us by kneeling at our feet,
stretching your arms wide to take away our sins,
walking through death to life again.*

L: And still you meet, call and save us,

A: We praise you!

LEADER

Glory to you Holy Spirit!
You brooded over chaos,
mothering and shaping God's new creation.



LEFT SIDE OF CHURCH

*You inspired prophets and evangelists
to discover the right word for the right season.*

RIGHT SIDE OF THE CHURCH

*You liberated the early church for mission,
claiming all of life for the Lord of all.*

L: And still you brood over, inspire and liberate us.

A: We praise you!

RIGHT SIDE OF THE CHURCH

*Glory to you, God, Three-in-One!
You are surrounded by the song of the saints in heaven,
and you are present with us now.*

TOGETHER

We adore you!

Adapted from In Spirit and In Truth: A Worship Book (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1991)

Prayer of Confession

VOICES 1+2

Lord, your ways are not our ways:
Your thoughts are not our thoughts:

VOICES 3+4

what to us seems like eternity
is only a moment to you.

VOICES 1+3

In the face of eternity,
help us to be humble.

VOICES 2+4

Forgive us

VOICE 1

If we have been singing praises with our voices
and kept the joy out of our hearts;

VOICE 2

If we have prayed only for what is possible
and hoped only for what we could see;

VOICE 3

If we have taken your grace for granted
and expected instant answers to immediate requests;

This prayer may be led by four people, each taking one voice. When choosing people, we invite you to consider people from different generations and cultures.



VOICE 4

If we have only thought of us waiting on you
and never pondered how you wait on us;

VOICES 2+3

If we have prayed, “Giver of Life, Sustain your Creation”
and succumbed to the economics of consumption;

VOICES 1+4

If we have prayed, “Spirit of Truth, Set us Free”
and chosen instead the slavery of silence.

ALL VOICES TOGETHER

If we have prayed, “Spirit of Unity, Reconcile your people”
and have not met with persons of other confessions or traditions in
our own neighbourhood.

ALL VOICES TOGETHER

Christ have mercy

RESPONSE

Christ have mercy

ALL VOICES TOGETHER

Amen

Adapted from In Spirit and In Truth: A Worship Book (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1991)

Declaration of Forgiveness

VOICE 1

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:

VOICE 2

Everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!

VOICE 3

Hear then Christ’s word of grace to us all

VOICE 4

‘Your sins are forgiven’

ALL VOICES TOGETHER

And be at peace

RESPONSE

Thanks be to God.

To emphasise the declaration of forgiveness, a person may pour water into the baptismal font at the beginning of this declaration.



Early Word

Scripture Reading

L: Your word is a lamp to our feet

A: And a light to our path

PSALM 126

L: When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,

A: Then were we like those who dream.

L: Then was our mouth filled with laughter

A: And our tongue with shouts of joy.

L: Then they said among the nations,

A: 'The Lord has done great things for them'.

L: The Lord has done great things for them.

A: And we are glad indeed.

L: Restore our fortunes, O Lord,

A: Like the watercourses of the Negev.

L: Those who sowed with tears,

A: Will reap with songs of joy.

L: Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed,

**A: Will come again with joy,
shouldering their sheaves.**

ISAIAH 43:16-21 (NRSV)

¹⁶Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,

¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;

they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

¹⁸ Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.

¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

²⁰ The wild animals will honour me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,

²¹ the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

L: These are words of faith

A: Thanks be to God.

We recognise that the early word may have many formats, ages and contexts. Here are some helpful sites to assist in planning this part of worship.

<http://worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.com/2016/02/year-c-fifth-sunday-in-lent-march-13.html>

www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3642/worship-for-kids-april-7-2019

When reading these two readings, consider reading from a different translation (Contemporary English Version, Message etc.), inviting readers from different generations, read in another language.

It may be useful to show images during the readings or homily. For example Mustard Seed .

<http://seedstuff.blogspot.com/2019/03/len-5-c-april-7-looking-to-futurewhat.html>



Reflection/Homily

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old

*What are the stories that help form your identity as a congregation/
community of faith? What do you find helpful remembering when
facing a crisis?*

We encounter the Israelites in Isaiah 43 when they are longing for home. They are awaiting the end of exilic life, and for the freedom to return to Jerusalem; to their home and all that is familiar.

The Experience of Exile - a Theological Crisis

Bereft of all those structures that offered support and identity – temple, monarchy, land, and freedom, the exiles were experiencing abandonment. Besides physical inconveniences, social, economic and political difficulties, and the psychological wounds arising from violence, humiliation, uncertainty, displacement, the exiles were also confronted by a theological crisis. Where was God? Jerusalem was already punished twice as much as she deserved (40:2). Had their God abandoned them? Were they no longer the chosen ones? Their captive status created fear, and raised issues of trust in their God, in their own abilities and panic and horror derived from imagined abandonment and forgetting by the very same God.

Against the frailty of and the massive disruption of exile Isaiah, a prophet of the exile sought to give hope and courage to a people too weary to gain strength and too fearful to search for hope. Isaiah 43:16-21 generates hope to see, hear, and imagine a future that is startlingly different from the bleak circumstances of the present. Isaiah 43 gives us an image of a God who brings a “new thing” - life in the midst of the desert. It compels us to view our experience of God’s grace in the past as a springboard so that we view neither present nor future with fear but with expectation and hope.

The Liberator God of the Exodus

How does Isaiah inculcate hope in this hurting community? What kind of a God does he describe? He affirms and emphasizes that their God is the God of power and majesty, a liberator God. The exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt - the house of bondage testify to this God. This is the God who creates a path through the mighty waters and leads chariots and horses, army and warriors onto this path to extinguish them like a wick

Isaiah suggests that the exilic community not remember the former things or consider the things of old (see also Isaiah 65:17). What is the prophet suggesting the community not forget? Is it the miracles performed by the powerful and glorious God of the Exodus? (Isaiah 65:18) No, rather, Isaiah is saying several things with this instruction:

This can either be read in place of the sermon or adapted by the preacher.

Congregations are invited to have group discussions, as appropriate. In addition, include an opportunity to write and/or draw as part of the thinking and sharing process.



- That the people's release will not necessarily be the same as the exodus from Egypt. Why? Because God is about to do a *new thing!* This God will “*make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert...*”;
- Let go of anything that might hold them captive and stop them from experiencing liberation and the love of God – a slavish mentality, shame, revenge, anger/bitterness against God, distrust or disappointment in God because of the suffering that they had to endure;
- That the people remember what is crucial for survival and a meaningful future. In order to recognize their oppressors and bring them to justice, the people must remember their pain and humiliation. Memory is crucial for identity and healing;
- To remember that the Israelites are children of God; to have faith in the liberating and freeing power of God that will accompany them in their journey toward freedom, and that this God is already at work securing their release.

Exile as Wilderness

Second Isaiah uses the motif of wilderness to describe the complex experiences of exile. The Exile is seen as wilderness life. Wilderness is Babylon. The Wilderness is a place of vulnerability, wandering, and an arid terrain, where survival is threatened. The Wilderness is therefore a place of danger, testing, scarcity, which captures the austere experience of forced deportation and internment. The Wilderness stimulates a puzzling vision of hope amid despair. It is paradoxical because configurations of hope are so implausible in such a setting.

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

The prophet assures the community that God is already ushering in this new thing, new life...it is springing forth, it is visible and palpable. This notion of a “new thing” that God is ushering in is (Isaiah 42:9; Jeremiah 31:22) conveyed with descriptions of what God will do. Following are some examples:

- Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink (Exodus 17:6).
- The wilderness and the land will be glad; the desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose (Isaiah 35:1)
- Then the lame will leap like a deer and the mute tongue will shout for joy (Isaiah 35:6)
- I will turn the desert into a pool of water, and the dry land into flowing springs (Isaiah 41: 18).

Note the use of imagery drawn mainly from nature to speak about this new thing. The desert and the wilderness will blossom through the watering that God will provide.



The creating and recreating of God brings life and hope, much like a stream or river flowing through a parched and dry land. Freedom, life, hope is rooted in the character/person and work of the Creator God. In this passage, Isaiah uplifts God the Creator and Redeemer to instill hope in the community.

Where do you see God doing a new thing in your congregation and/or the wider community in which you worship?

For Christians, God becoming human in Jesus Christ was and continues to be the most 'new thing'. For God to come to meet us in our messiness and joy is revolutionary; what we do in our lives is in response to this new creation, this gift of newness and love.

The new signs of life you see God bringing in your community – how might you respond to that life and hope? How can you partner with the God who brings forth 'the new thing'?

Monica Melancthon, Coordinator of Studies – Old Testament, Pilgrim Theological College

Affirmation of Faith

We are not alone

We are not alone,
We live in God's world.

We believe in God:
Who has created and is creating,
Who has come in Jesus,
The Word made flesh,
To reconcile and make new,
Who works in us and others
By the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
To celebrate God's presence,
To live with respect in creation,
To love and serve others,
To seek justice and resist evil,
To proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,

Our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

The United Church of Canada, General Council 1968, alt 1998. In UIW2, pg 272



Hymn/Song

TiS 658 – I the Lord of sea and sky or **TiS 468** – We are your people.

Offering

Invite young people to collect.

Prayers of the people

Gracious God. Teach us to pray, as Jesus taught his disciples to pray. We pray for the world. Divided by race, language, religion class, ability, gender and sexuality, saying:

Our Father in heaven

We pray for your church, and especially at this time for our Synod. For all people who bear Christ's name, saying:

Hallowed be your name

We pray for those who are deprived of justice, peace, freedom and hope. May their wilderness become rivers in the desert, saying:

Your kingdom come

We pray for people who exercise power; for governments, businesses, unions and the media saying:

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

We pray for those who lack food, shelter, clothing, medical care and love saying:

Give us today our daily bread

We pray for all who turn away from their neighbour in need saying:

Forgive us our sin

We pray for those who hurt us, who treat us with little respect, saying:

As we forgive those who sin against us

We pray for those enduring sickness, facing death, mourning the loss of a loved one, coping with unemployment, filled with despair or contemplating suicide. May their weeping become joy, saying:

Save us in the time of trial

We pray for those who live with the threat of death from war and terrorism, or who live in fear of violence in their own homes, saying:

Deliver us from evil

We pray all this, for our hope and trust is in you, for you alone can save us, saying:

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

AMEN.



Hymn/Song

TIS755 – You shall go out with joy.

Sing three times
with a quickening
tempo each time.

Blessing and Sending out

(Based on Philippians 4:7 & Isaiah 43)

The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
the One who makes rivers in the desert
and brings forth water in the wilderness.

The blessing of this God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you all
and remain with you always.

AMEN.

Additional Notes For The Homily

The Historical Context

For two centuries (ca. 922-722 BCE), the neighboring kingdoms of Israel in the north and Judah in the south had coexisted, sometimes peacefully as allies and sometimes with tensions between them. With the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE, Judah was without a potential ally to the north, which would also act as a buffer state in the event of invasion from Mesopotamian empires. The fall of Israel meant an influx of refugees into Judah, which would have effects on politics, religion and society in general for generations to come.

Judah also had to deal with invasion by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. At times, it became a vassal state to the more powerful kingdom. Only when Assyria was preoccupied with its own survival on its home front in the late 7th century did Judah enjoy a level of independence. But from ca. 605 BCE, with the fall of the Assyrian empire, the kingdom of Judah, centered around Jerusalem, came under Babylonian rule. It did not accept that rule easily. The last few kings of Judah, each appointed under Babylonian oversight, all rebelled.

In 597, during the reign of Jehoiachin (598-7), Jerusalem rebelled against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar (604-562) squashed this rebellion. Jehoiachin surrendered and was taken to Babylon (2Kgs 24: 10-17). In 588 - 587 there was a second rebellion against Babylon under Zedekiah (597-87). Nebuchadnezzar quashed this rebellion; he besieged Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and city walls, killed many and took a number of the population into exile (2 Kgs 25:1-12; cf. Jer 39, 52). Some of the ruling classes, artisans, and priests are to be reckoned as exiles.



The exile lasted until 539 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed a stable reign from 604-562 so there was no immediate hope of release for those in exile. While the exiles were not reduced to slavery, it is still likely that the Judaeans community faced all the difficulties of an ethnic minority in a foreign place. Many people were left in the land. Life in ruined Jerusalem and on the big estates was severely disrupted. Considerable social upheaval seems to have taken place in Jerusalem society in the absence of the old ruling classes and groups.

Second Isaiah - Messenger of Faith and Hope

Against the frailty of and the massive disruption of exile this prophet of the exile sought to give hope and courage to a people too weary to gain strength and too fearful to search for hope. Second Isaiah also known as the 'Isaiah of Babylon,' or the 'Isaiah of the Exile' is credited to have been the author of chapters 40-55. We know next to nothing about this man, how long he preached or anything about his background except that he was among the exiles in Babylon. According to Lawrence Boadt, "he has hidden his own identity behind that of the great prophet Isaiah so that those who hear or read his prophecies will see only the continuity of what God is doing from Isaiah's age to his own."

This obscure prophet in Babylon was primarily concerned with workings of God rather than with himself, which is evident in his messages. He firmly believed that the changes that were about to take pace would be the work of God and not because of any effort on the part of the exiles. In chapter 43:16-21, the prophet offers insights and strategies to help the community cope and derive hope.

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Affirmation of faith is from *The United Church of Canada*, General Council 1968, alt 1998. In *Uniting In Worship 2*, pg 272.

Prayers of the People was prepared by Andy Calder (Disability Inclusion Advocate & Director of Uniting CPE – The John Paver Centre).

Hymns are taken from *Together in Song*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.