

Sunday 11 October 2020: Pentecost 19 A

“Middle of the Road”

Curated/Integrated Meaning Making Activities

Instead of a sermon, these short reflections and activities are designed to help us all to take time to reflect thoughtfully and prayerfully on the bible readings of the day. There are a number of different activities for you to choose from – the aim is that there is something for people of all ages and stages, for people of deep faith, and for those who are thinking about the Christian faith from the margins. We hope that there is something here for everyone to try. We encourage you to share your thoughts and learnings – or your journaling or drawing with all of the Network, either by emailing it to sandybrodine@gmail.com or via the Banyule Network Facebook page. That way, we can all learn and grow from hearing the thoughts of others across our church community.

Readings:

Exodus 32:1-14

Philippians 4:1-9

Reflection

These two readings reflect Communities in turmoil. In the Exodus story, the Israelites are still wandering in the wilderness. Despite God’s faithful provision of manna and water and the giving of the 10 Commandments, they are still rather cranky. Moses is delayed coming down from the Mountain, and so the Israelites who “do not know what has become of him” tell Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship. In the middle of their journey they take off their rings and form a mould and cast an image of a calf, place it on an altar and make sacrifices to it. God sees what has happened and is angered at their faithlessness and sends Moses down to tell them of God’s wrath. Moses intercedes with God on the Israelites’ behalf.

You may remember that the Banyule Network engaged in a 4 week study series on Philippians in 2016, in our worship services, and with a 4 week study series. It is good to be able to return to this text again as a community, and see what it has to teach us today.

Paul writes this letter to the church at Philippi from prison, probably in Rome, uncertain of his future. The community he writes to is also facing an uncertain future as it faces persecution and competing theologies from the outside and some strong disagreements within. Sound at all familiar? Yet in the midst of these difficult circumstances the feelings that pervade the letter are joy and peace. The challenge for us as we listen, then, is to capture some of this still centre for ourselves.

Philippi was the leading city in Macedonia, founded by Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. It was at Philippi that Antony fought against and defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar in 42 BC. Philippi then became a Roman military colony,

populated by former Roman soldiers and governed by Roman municipal law. It was in effect a mini Rome. It was located on the Egnatian Way, an important trading route between Europe and Asia.

Paul visited the city in around 50 AD, as described in Acts 16. He and Silas were thrown into prison there on a charge of 'advocating customs that are not lawful for ... Romans to adopt or observe' (Acts 16:21). Perhaps foremost among these illegal customs was encouraging people to acknowledge and worship a Lord and Saviour other than the Roman Emperor; i.e. Jesus Christ. Paul writes that this 'slave' who was crucified on a Roman cross is rightly to be worshipped as Lord (Phil 2:6-11) and Saviour (Phil 3:20). In a city where worship of the Emperor was prominent and expected, such a stance was likely to lead to both ridicule and confrontation.

Anxiety was also a feature of church life back in Paul's day. This is the context into which he is writing in the closing chapter of his Letter to the Philippians. Just like today, it led to division and disagreement in the community on the best way forward. It tempted some people to compromise on their faith or to seek an easier gospel to follow. It threatened the health of the community. Paul aims to reframe the conversation in this closing chapter. He is giving the people at Philippi some other ways to reframe their community life in troubled times.

How much do these two stories speak into our present reality? Doesn't it feel a little like we are stuck in the 'middle of the road' unable to see what lies ahead as we wait for the end of lockdown?

(Activities continue on next page)

Integrated Meaning Making Activities:

Lectio Divina (Divine Reading)

Take some time to prayerfully read one or both of the texts for today. Use the pattern for 'Lectio Divina' that we learned during the Holy Habits Lenten Studies on prayer earlier in the year. If you need a refresher, or want to learn how to do 'Lectio Divina' you can find the resource online [here](#).

Questions for Contemplation:

God's **peace** is the gift and safeguard against our worry and anxiety (Phil 4:6-7, 10). We may think of peace as simply the absence of war or violence. But the Hebrew concept of peace or **shalom** is much richer. Its meaning is closer to wholeness and joy – a sense that one is in right relationship with God, with neighbour, with the rest of creation and with oneself.

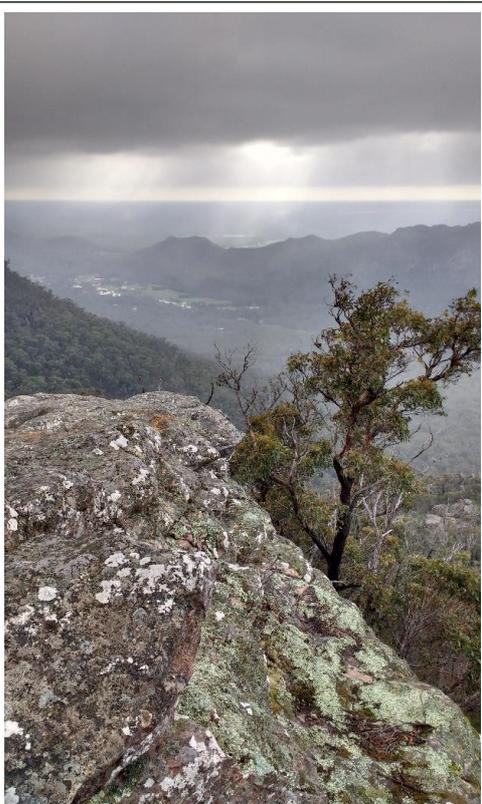


Photo: Rev. Dr. Peter Mallen.

- Our current reality, in continued lockdown as we try to cope with the reality of COVID 19 makes us continually anxious. how does God's peace offer us an alternative framework?
- What does it mean to be a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9) in a world divided by fear, injustice and greed? What does 'peace' look like?
- As suggested by this photo from the Grampians, we sometimes face stormy weather in our lives. How does God's peace help us through such times?
- Look closely at the list of characteristics that Paul is suggesting to the community at Philippi in 4:1-9. If our church community were to focus on reflecting some of these to each other and the community beyond how might we live differently?

I invite you to journal your answers and SHARE them with the Banyule Community.

Visio Divina: (The practice of reflecting on Art)

A major priority for Paul is to call the whole community back to what is central – joy and peace (v4-7) – both fruits of God’s Spirit – and signs that the Lord is near – even in their midst.



Dancing Ladies, Martin Bulinya

Although many African live anxious difficult lives, their worship is often full of joy, colour, movement and celebration. Check out the post of Calvin Frans, priest and Messy Church leader in South Africa that was posted on the Banyule Network Facebook page this week as a current example of joyous African dance in worship!

- When is the last time you truly rejoiced about anything, allowing joy to override your other emotions and thoughts? What prompted such joy?
- How might our worship express such joy? How might prayer express such joy?
- How might our church community reflect the joy of knowing Jesus to the world around us?

I invite you to journal your answers and **SHARE** them with the Banyule Community.

Word Art

Philippians 4 is filled with verses telling of, and rejoicing in, the strength we find in Christ. Choose your favourite section of the reading and use the water colour pencils and water brushes to produce your own artistic rendition of the verse you've chosen.... There are some examples below to inspire you!



I invite you to SHARE your artistic response with the Banyule Community.