

A song to sing or to read: *Servant Song*

Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey and companions on the road
We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping, when you laugh I'll laugh with you
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony
Born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

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Closing Prayer

So travel on, in hope and faith, in love and light-heartedness, in the
expectation of meeting the unexpected.

Amen

With thanks to Shirley Colless for preparing today's reflection



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Church in a Bag
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Dubbo Uniting Church



Call to worship

We are pilgrims, ever travelling. Yesterday is a memory, a history;
tomorrow is a dream, a vision; but today is the gift of reality. Today is
all we have, but we use our history and our dreams to shape the reality
of the here and now, to guide us.



Preparation

On the first Sunday in Advent we began our journey into the new
Christian year. We looked forward to celebrating the coming of the
Messiah and celebrating the unexpected – not a royal prince born into
wealth and power but a child born a nonentity, supposedly to a
carpenter and his wife. A nothing, raised in a nothing town, in a
nothing region. As one of our hymns points out, God moves in
mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

Reading: John 1:10–14

Reflection

Now, as we move further into the Christian year, we come to the end of the Christmas season, and next week move into the time of the Epiphany. This is the time we celebrate the first revelation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, represented by the Magi and the manifestation of his divinity, as it occurred at his baptism in the Jordan. Remember that the Magi were not Kings and that the Bible does not say that there were three wise men.

But we are also tied to secular time. Two days ago we began our journey through the yearly calendar, where we mark off the passing of time - the days, the months, the civil and religious celebrations - in hope that this new year will not bring us the stresses and anxieties of the past year, with everything seeming too severe. We have lived through drought, fire, flood, a pandemic illness, forced isolation, loss of employment, the closing of businesses, the deaths of loved ones... and then the rains came, the cereal farmers were able to garner a huge harvest..... and the promise of Advent, in hope, peace, joy, and love, seemed to promise better times.

A song to sing or to read: All my hope in God is founded

All my hope on God is founded, all my trust he will renew
Through all change and chance, he guides me
Only good and only true
God unknown, he alone calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory, sword and crown betray our trust
All we build with care and labour, tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour
Is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness lasts for ever, deep his wisdom, passing thought
Splendour, light and life attend him, beauty springing out of naught.
Evermore from his store
New-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily the almighty giver will his bounteous gifts bestow
In his will our souls find pleasure, leading us where'er we go.
Love will stand at his hand
Joy shall wait for his command.

Still from earth to God eternal sacrifice of praise be done
High above all praises praising for the gift of Christ his Son.
Hear Christ call one and all
Those who follow shall not fall.

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We hope for much. We see in Jesus the hope of the world, the Saviour, the Good Shepherd, the manifestation in human form of God's grace and love and justice and mercy, and we ask (oh how we ask). Ask and you shall receive. But how do we feel when God does not appear to provide us with what we have asked for? What if the coming year will continue to be a time of trial and a time of uncertainty, politically, socially, environmentally, economically, personally? What if God's face appears to be turned away from us?

In times of stress and trauma, and of loss and grief, when we seek an explanation, God responds in unexpected ways. A young Bible College student, in 2013, reflecting on why God did not save his home from being burned down, found the answer in the way he and his family were overwhelmed by the generosity shown by friends, family and complete strangers. He was energised to realise that as a society, we need moments of loss in order to extract the true humanity which is hidden beneath a veneer of individualism and materialism. The character of God's generosity is seen so clearly in those created in his image when true need arises, giving them the increasingly rare opportunity to throw off the shackles of a consumer driven society to selflessly consider those around them. Is this not how God asks us to live always?

He now saw in this tragedy not simply property lost, but humanity found, as people live out their inbuilt desire to care for the other.