

Tuesday Worship—General Assembly 2023

Short song for the day

CH 805 Mayenziwe

Call to Worship

I would invite you this morning, as an act of worship, to stand up, take a moment and mentally, emotionally, and spiritually put your bags down – your pre-determined decisions, your carefully written scripts, your too -far's and your no-go's. You can pick them back up again if you feel you need them but feel the freedom of being genuinely open to a new creation. Let us worship God.

Song

10,000 reasons (Bless the Lord oh my soul)

Prayer

Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock (deep breath/sigh) ... when the sound of the clock hammers in our heads (and our hearts hurry to keep up), God of creation, help us consider the more expansive nature of time and retune the ears of our spirit. We are aware of our breathing – lungs expanding – easily, automatically, effortlessly. Consider the sound of the wind whispering through the trees, the relentless ocean rolling and gravity pulling and the planets spinning

Leader: There is a time for every season under heaven.

All: And always, always, always, you are creating something new.

Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock (deep breath out) ... when change whirls recklessly round us like a vortex, pulling us down and spitting us out, when each change brings choices that bring even more change, then more choices and all the variables give us a tangible sense of vertigo, God of creation, slow the wild spinning in our minds and help us rebalance and recentre. Change is a constant, but we are creatures of habit and long, even when restless, to find rest in what is familiar. The season is changing, and we sense it – remind us ...

Leader: There is a time for every season under heaven.

All: And always, always, always, you are creating something new.

(Say this slowly) Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock (slow and extended breath out) ... when nothing happens and nobody comes and time drags on in slow motion – and we're so tired of it, God of creation, stir in us. Send our spirits towards each other, especially the ones who are lonely. Cajole and challenge our complacency, the comfortable apathy that can slow us like treacle. Just don't let us rest while our sisters and brothers suffer injustice. Shake our souls to their very cores and dare us to be hopeful, even in these testing times. There is a time for every season under heaven and this turning of time cannot be rewound.

Leader: There is a time for every season under heaven.

All: And always, always, always, you are creating something new.

Always, always, always, you are creating something new. So always, always, always create that new in and through and with us. Amen.

Readings

Genesis 1:1-5

When God began to create^[a] the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God^[b] swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there^[a] is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!^[b] ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,^[c] not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God.

Reflection

Have you been looking forward to it forever, or dreading it like the plague? Have you planned and made lists and calculated for every possible twist and turn, or are you more of a 'take it as it comes' kind of person? Regardless, it's coming. And what about the ones you've already had? Were they the very best, never to be repeated or is that where the hard-earned lessons live, and the best is yet to come? Regardless, for better or worse, we can't stop it – it's coming. A new day/aka change. A new day – it's always on the horizon – And we know there have been times when they've flown by (blink and you missed it!) and times where you never thought you'd see them again. And when we pause long enough to reflect on our humanity, it dawns on us (until we push it back into our subconscious) that there will come a new day which we won't see, but those we love will. And their perspective will be influenced by the new days we shared with them. There will come a new day that we won't see, but those we share the planet with will. What echo or footprint or mark will we have left here? And what, if anything, do we owe them – our global neighbours/the ones not even here yet? There's a question.

The story in Genesis begins our whole faith epic with these words ... in the beginning, God created. Our opening statement of faith begins with a glimpse into the creative imagination of God. This text is as deep as the waters God's spirit swept over; the imagery so potent we can almost feel the spirit wind on our faces, immerse ourselves in the deep, close our eyes and see the light dance in that new-day dawning. The story whispers - even when the earth seems to be in complete chaos, God's spirit is moving through it. Even when it is hard to see, God is bringing light. God calls creation good and God calls us, challenges us, cries to us through every created thing, to cherish every created thing.

We cannot underestimate the challenges ahead of us. The last years have brought home in powerful ways that we share one tiny, fragile, totally inter-related planet – let's not hide behind over-used, almost benign sounding cliches like climate change or global warming – let's name it for what it is– climate disruption and global heating. The science is undeniable, and the danger is clear. We have to create something new, and we have to do it now. Sisters and brothers are suffering now and those suffering most are the ones who had least to do with causing this.

The pandemic drew us closer like a deep intake of breath. There can be no them and us – only us. War has come close to home, in Ukraine, it is so close that we recognise its face. For so many years, it stayed an arms distance away. We felt for those suffering, but did we see ourselves in their eyes? We do now, so how do we respond with that same gut-wrenching empathy when violence isn't next door?

We cannot underestimate the challenges ahead of us. For all the financial and resource challenges we as a church have wrestled with over the last years; with the information

we're just beginning to digest at this General Assembly, we know the challenges these new days are bringing are substantial. BUT – saints of God, for that is who you are, we know other things too.

In the beginning, God created. Even when the earth seemed to be in complete chaos, God's spirit was moving through it. Even when it was hard to see, God was bringing light. God called and still calls creation good, and calls us, challenges us, cries to us through every created thing, to cherish every created thing. So, there's our template, our vision, our call. We know we cannot underestimate the challenges that lie ahead of us, but that's not all we know.

In the beginning God created, yes, but God's not finished yet. Because we hear that 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! And this creating comes from God, who reconciled with us through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; so, we are ambassadors for Christ, called to be reconciled to God.

What will this new creation look like if it is reconciled to God? Being reconciled? What do we mean? Well, we can stop at 'good relations re-established' 'restore friendship or harmony' or we can dig deeper ... for it can also mean 'to make consistent with' – to make consistent with God? How do we even begin to fathom that? It almost feels heretical to think we could? But we have a template, a vision, a call. We know we cannot underestimate the challenges that lie ahead of us, but that's not all we know. Remember who you are – body of Christ. In this world, re-membering his life, his love, the lessons he taught, the laughter he shared and the tears he shed. In this world – drawing every created thing to you and feeding, healing, forgiving and making all things new. As we continue the business of this General Assembly, be open to where the spirit is moving, listen to the new word we may need to hear. And be brave because we have choices to make, decisions to take. And in all of this, remember who you are and why he calls us.

Song

CH 172 'Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation'