

Second Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

Sunday 2 June 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Ana Gobledale, retired Minister of the United Reformed Church and Editor of the Worship Words website, for her thoughts on the second Sunday after Pentecost.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website: https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.



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Introduction

I'm grateful for two lessons in my early ministry in rural South Africa. First, prepare for worship with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Second, approach the task with both authority and humility – trust that I can do what is required, and I can do it well, and remember that God is using me for purposes beyond my control.

These are the fundamental tools I use:

- **Prayer**: I start on Monday with prayer, asking for God's involvement in this process of study, writing and preaching, so that it's not just 'Ana's thing.' I pray for an open mind and heart, asking how best to be of service to God and my congregation.
- **Bible:** I discipline myself to read all of the lectionary passages, resisting the temptation to settle on one, even if my head is full of ideas, until all are read. I start with a scholarly translation, usually The New Revised Standard Version, initially avoiding interpretive versions such as 'The Message'. Being open to commentary and interpretation comes later.
- **Newspaper:** I keep an eye on the news local and global. I keep my ears open to concerns of my congregation. (e.g. June is Pride month)
- **Familiarity:** I consider who the worshippers will be. If I'm preaching somewhere I've never been before, I arrive an hour early and walk through the worship space and peruse the notice board (Church Meeting Minutes tell a lot about a congregation!).
- What other people think: I read at least a second Bible translation, often 'The Message'. Have I understood the intended meanings of the Hebrew or Greek words? If puzzled by a word or phrase, I use a dictionary. I start with a known and trusted commentary. I'm wary to search on line, as it can be difficult to find a reliable source. As I read each commentary, I ask myself:
 - O Do their ideas resonate with my own thoughts?
 - o Have I seemingly missed the point, as others have seen it, of the passage?
 - What ideas might I use in my sermon/message?

I jot down words or phrases that speak to me, noting who said them.

Midweek, I have done my homework with the text, newspaper and commentaries. Now I ask, 'What is the message? What do I want to say? What does God want me to say? What will the sermon do – comfort, challenge, empower, explain? What is the nugget the worshippers will take away with them?' This will be a single sentence, e.g. 'God empowers



us to stand with fortitude in the face of conflict.' I then select two or three readings to include. Next, I find prayers, hymns, examples from history and current news that reinforce the theme. I consider what form the sermon will take: traditional, storytelling, interview, drama, reflective questions.

I love to preach, but only if I'm preaching something exciting, interesting and meaningful for the listeners. I want to respect that they have given me their time and attention, and I want to trust that God is part of it too.

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)

Engaging with the passage — Who? When? Where? Why? How? Whom do we meet? Samuel, a child 'given' to the Temple by his parents, and Eli the Temple's Priest. Interestingly, their roles seem reversed — Eli, the Elder High Priest, does not hear God's voice; rather, Samuel, the young child, does.

What happens? God's voice informs the duo that things will not progress as usual – those expected to follow in Eli's footsteps, his own children, are being replaced by this boy. Eli and Samuel accept and trust God's news and live into it. An inclusive language drama is available on the Worship Words website to present during worship. https://worshipwords.co.uk/call-waiting-drama-of-samuels-call-tod-gobledale-uk/

Themes and questions arising from the text and the heart:

• Trust

What is trust? What does it feel like? When have you, like Samuel and Eli, had to trust in something you don't understand?

Samuel is called 'trustworthy'. What qualities define a trustworthy person. Who do you know who is trustworthy? Why? Are you a trustworthy person? Why or why not?

Disappointment

Eli's disappointment in his children is profound; they have not turned out the way he has hoped. Also, we remember the great disappointment of Hannah, Samuel's mother, when she is unable to bear children.

- When have you been disappointed in someone you love? How did it feel? Did you
 have to make any choices or decisions as a result of your disappointment?
- When have you been disappointed in life? Have you ever felt angry at God?
- Have you ever been the source of disappointment for those who love you? How have you let others down?



O What can we do with disappointment? What might God have us do?

Call

This passage, presenting an example of a call from God, often appears at inductions and ordinations.

- O Do you think God talks with a human voice? In what ways might this 'human voice' be interpreted?
- Have you ever received a clear call from God as Samuel does? What happened? Was it heard? Felt? Seen? To what were you being called? How did you know it was God talking to you?
- O Do you feel worthy of a call from God? What might God call upon you for? Would you recognise God's 'voice'? Who might help you interpret and understand God's call?

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Engaging with the passage – Who? When? Where? Why? How? Whom do we meet? This intimate song of disclosure and vulnerability harkens from a single voice.

What happens? One's soul is being laid bare before us and God's attributes are being described. A song of wonder, love, and profound praise reveals the intimate connection/relationship between God and God's wonderful works of creation (v14). Psalm 139 is often used at LGBTQ+ friendly worship events.

Themes and questions arising from the text and the heart:

Total Acceptance; fully loved

Wow! Really? Am I so fully known and still found acceptable? Too wonderful!

In a world where secrets and untruths thrive, the complete openness and vulnerability of the writer sound refreshing. A popular reading at truly inclusive Christian gatherings, Psalm 139 holds God fully responsible for how we are created. For someone who has been demonised and often marginalised for how they were born, the words of verses 13-14 surely resound with joy! "For it was you [God!] who formed my inward parts; you [God!] knit me together in my mother's womb. ...I am ...wonderfully made."

- What attributes of others do you find difficult to attribute to God's creative hand?
- What in yourself do you find difficult to accept as God's responsibility?
- How might one move toward acceptance of others and of ourselves as we truly are?
 What might help this movement?



Vulnerability & Intimacy

Being seen and known puts one in a vulnerable position. Never being able to hide, being constantly watched, observed and touched might make one uncomfortable. Yet this writer, starting from a place of vulnerability strongly affirms in closing, "I am still with you."

- How do you feel about God being 'acquainted with all' your ways? How do you respond to the image of being hemmed in by God?
- When have you felt vulnerable before God? Before your Maker? What was the impact of the experience on your faith: did it weaken or strengthen it?

God's attributes:

- What do we learn about God in this passage? God is a Searcher (v1), a Knower (v1,2), a Discerner (v2). God follows us (v3), is familiar with our ways (v3), knows our minds (v4), surrounds us (v5). God stays close enough to touch us (v5). God sculpts (v13), knits (13), weaves (15), and makes/creates (v13). God is a writer (v16) and a thinker (v17).
- What names for God are most meaningful for you? You might try using other terms to describe the attributes noted in this Psalm.

Mark 2:23-3:6

Engaging with the passage – Who? When? Where? Why? How? Whom do we meet? Jesus, disciples, Pharisees, everyone in the synagogue, man with a 'withered hand', 'Herodians' (supporters of Herod).

What happens? Conflict between Jesus and religious leaders continues to the point that Jesus gets angry and the Pharisees go off to plot His destruction. People are fed and healed, but the Law has been broken. Jesus, to no avail, tries to explain to the Pharisees that their strict piety is not godliness.

Themes and questions arising from the text and the heart:

• Fortitude – Perseverance in the face of condemnation

When I lived in South Africa under Apartheid Law, at church gatherings the names of those absent because they were being held in prison, were called out. Martyrs of the past and present often pay a high price for their witness and perseverance.



How tolerant are we with those who defy/break the rules to proclaim and witness to God's realm? With folks who block roadways in the name of Love-for-God's-Creation, or protest against violence in the name of Emmanuel? Do we see Jesus in their faces and Jesus' footsteps in their actions? Or do we stand with the Pharisees and wish such 'trouble-makers' would cease? Are we relieved when police remove them?

- What has changed in history because some individual or group persevered in their Christian witness and protest in the face of condemnation?
- Who do you know, personally or from the news, who has made sacrifices for persevering in their Christian witness through unpopular or illegal actions?
- Do you have the commitment to God's love and justice required to stand up to injustice and wrong-doing? How might you find this commitment?

Jesus gets angry!

Jesus is NOT always meek and mild. Mark 3:5 is the one place in the Gospels that anger (orge) is attributed to Jesus. This term refers to God's wrath in the other Gospels (Matt 3:7; Luke 3:7, 21:23; John 3:36). How do you feel about seeing Jesus get angry? How does this fit in, or not, with your understanding of Jesus?

- When do you feel angry? When is it following in the footsteps of Jesus? When is it leading you astray?
- When might anger be a blessing/gift from God?

• Meaning of Sabbath (Shabbat)

Jesus is not trying to save the planet, but aims to remind religious leaders of the original intent of the Sabbath law: not to enforce piety but to restore and renew our relationship with God.

- The Pharisees are faithful, caring people striving to protect their flock from straying. They enforce cherished traditions and practices. When do we enforce traditions and practices to the detriment of the spiritual life of our faith community?
- What would we like to change in our church and in the wider Church to bring it closer in line with God's will for us?

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Engaging with the passage – Who? What? When? Where? Why? Whom do we meet? Paul, once a Pharisee protecting the Law, now protecting the new Way.



What happens? Paul writes to the Christian community in Corinth, Greece, with his familiar complex sentence structure. His words teach, encourage and guide, and perhaps confuse.

Themes and questions arising from the text and the heart:

Cultivating Fortitude: perseverance in the face of hardship

Paul encourages the faith community at Corinth to persevere. Knowing they have faced adversity, Paul reminds them that God's light shines 'out of darkness.'

- When have you felt 'afflicted', 'perplexed', 'persecuted' or 'struck down'? When have you drawn near to despair?
- O What happened that you were not 'crushed,' 'forsaken' or destroyed'?
- Reflecting on Paul's ability to persevere, what inner spiritual strengths enable us to cultivate fortitude?
- The Roman Catholic Church ranks fortitude a cardinal virtue. Whose life, in history, illustrates fortitude?

• Growing in humility

Saul the Pharisee, in defence of his religion and driven by his beliefs, violently subdued Christians. Now Paul the Christian, in defence of his new religion and driven by his new beliefs, fervently impresses these beliefs on others. Yet Paul's words speak of humility: "we do not proclaim ourselves."

- Have you ever struggled with knowing you are right, yet realising no one will listen unless you approach them with humility?
- How might confidence and humility mix? How can we proclaim a truth in a humble manner?
- Consider historical figures who have demonstrated a healthy blend of humility and authority?

• Reflecting the 'glory of God' (v6)

What is the 'glory of God'? Synonyms for glory might include magnificence, splendour and grandeur. Paul refers to this "extraordinary power [that] belongs to God...." (v7)

- Where and when have you experienced the glory of God?
- Paul suggests that God's glory emanates or reflects from the face of Christ. What does this mean for you?
- When has God's light shone into your heart? Describe an experience of divine illumination in your life.



Sermon ideas

There are numerous exciting and worthwhile themes one could choose for the sermon focus. For this exercise, I have chosen one that stands out for me.

After reading all the passages, the theme of fortitude – perseverance in the face of conflict, resonates with me. It features prominently in the passages from both Mark and Corinthians. Samuel provides a case study in perseverance.

I ask: what is the message; what do I want to say; what does God want me to say? Theme sentence: God empowers us to stand with fortitude in the face of conflict.

Three possibilities for the form of the sermon/message arise for me:

- Focusing on Jesus the confident, angry activist, who persists in the face of condemnation, tell the story of an historic figure who illustrates fortitude, e.g. Nelson Mandela, Florence Nightingale, a miner (marking 40th anniversary of the 1984-5 strike).
- Interview a biblical character who witnessed Jesus's anger and fortitude: a disciple, a Pharisee or the healed man. Use the interview to go deeper into how the witness felt and what it means to follow Jesus.
- Focusing on Paul's understanding of affliction and perseverance, hear a testimony from or interview a member of the LGBTQ+ community to hear how they have, with fortitude, persevered in the face of affliction and oppression.

I might conclude any of these with questions to the congregation about their own faith and fortitude.

Both the Mark and 1 Samuel passages present dynamic situations and wonderful opportunities for drama in worship. In Mark we encounter conflict, anger, defiance and joy. In Samuel qualities of trust, obedience and perseverance arise in the characters. To bring these passages alive, a simple multi-voice reading, directly from the scripture, can suffice. Or one might enliven the stories, drawing out the chosen theme, considering what the characters might have been thinking or pondering. Historically, the biblical characters are all male, but may be dramatically portrayed by anyone. This dramatic reading might precede the sermon.

June is often Pride Month, a time we celebrate the magnificence of God's creation, the delight God finds in the rainbow of humanity. Psalm 139 offers the opportunity to express



our corporate wonder at the intricate and beloved design and creation of us all. In an interview, I might ask questions, which I would give to the person well ahead of time, such as:

- When have you had to face affliction with perseverance?
- What has been your experience in the Church?
- How might the Church best be supportive of the LGBTQ+ community?
- Where have you experienced God in your life?
- What would you like to share with us about your faith?

I open and close my sermon with prayer. This reminds me and others that God is an active participant in the process. It keeps me humble. The closing prayer restates the theme and asks God to help us live into the message of the sermon.

Prayers

Today's prayers highlight various themes and phrases from today's readings, especially Psalm 139 and 2 Corinthians.

Responsive prayers:

- When leading a responsive prayer, remember, if being recorded or on Zoom, to read the responses in bold into a microphone so they can be heard by those online.
- The responses in bold might be read by a single voice instead of the entire congregation if the means for sharing the words is not available.
- Read with feeling!

Call to worship (arising from Psalm 139 & 2 Corinthians 4)

Come! Celebrate God's creation!

We come, created wonderfully by God.

Come! Ready to hear God's voice.

We come, with open ears and hearts.

Come! Whether afflicted, perplexed or persecuted.

We come, ready to persevere in our faith.

Come to worship the God of light.



We come, open to the extraordinary power of God!

Prayer of Confession (inspired by Psalm 139 & 2 Corinthians 4)

We come before God, who already knows everything about us. Yet we persist in prayer.

We persevere, confessing aloud our failures.

Through this discipline, we cultivate humility and confidence. Join me in our prayer of confession.

O God, You have searched us and You know us. Even before we speak, You know our thoughts.

In Your mercy, Lay Your hand upon us.

When we have strayed, You have hemmed us in, protecting us from hurting ourselves and others.

In Your mercy, Lay Your hand upon us.

How have we strayed?
In wanting things to change but doing nothing about it.
In not listening, not caring enough about others.
In speaking too much, caring only about our own opinions.
In staying silent in the face of abuse and manipulation.
In holding back, afraid of consequences and condemnation.
O God, forgive us.

In Your mercy,
Lay Your hand upon us.

The Psalmist says, You know everything about us.
But do You know
our fascination with the suffering of others?
Our obsession with doom and gloom?
Our compulsion to consume extra food and drink?
Our nasty thoughts about our partner and parents?
Our yearning for greater purpose and meaning?



O God, forgive us.

In Your mercy, Lay Your hand upon us.

These confessions are not news to You. Yet in sharing them here in this community we remember our absolute need for You in our life to forgive, renew and redirect us, to encourage and empower us to live with hope, fortified with Your love.

Thank You for Your guiding hand upon us. Amen.

Prayer of Gratitude (arising from Psalm 139 & 2 Corinthians 4)

We come before God, who already knows everything about us. Yet we persist in prayer, exclaiming aloud our joy and thanksgiving. Through this discipline, we cultivate gratitude and humility. Join me in our prayer of gratitude.

O God, You have searched us and You know us. Even before we speak, You know our thoughts.

In gratitude,
We lift our prayer to You.

Your light shines into our hearts and the darkness does not overcome it.

In gratitude, We lift our prayer to You.

We encounter afflictions in our bodies and minds, but we are not crushed.

In gratitude, We lift our prayer to You.



We find ourselves perplexed by the state of our world but we are not driven to despair.

In gratitude,

We lift our prayer to You.

We have been struck down by divorce, unemployment, economic hardship. But we are not destroyed.

In gratitude,

We lift our prayer to You.

In this moment we marvel that we are still with You. You never give up on us.

In gratitude,

We lift our prayer to You.

Version 2:

O God, You have searched us and You know us. **Even before we speak, You know our thoughts.**

Your light shines into our hearts

And the darkness does not overcome it.

We encounter afflictions in our bodies and minds, **But we are not crushed.**

We find ourselves perplexed by the state of our world, **But we are not driven to despair.**

We have been struck down by divorce, unemployment, economic hardship, **But we are not destroyed.**

In this moment we marvel that we are still with You.

You never give up on us.

In gratitude, we lift our prayer to You.

Amen.



Prayer of Intercession (inspired by today's readings)

Watching the news can be a frightening experience these days.

Images of violence, abuse, retaliation, hatred fill our screens.

We may have a strong urge to help, but often feel helpless.

One thing we can do is persevere in prayers of intercession, lifting up prayers on behalf of others, prayers which have arisen in our hearts.

Join me in our prayer of intercession.

Creator of Light,

our world needs You.

Shine into the hearts of all people,

that everyone might know Your magnificence.

Shine into the homes of the abused and controlled.

Bring to wholeness those whose lives have been shattered

by physical and emotional abuse.

Encourage those who are walking through divorce,

assuring them that You have not abandoned them.

Fill their hearts and minds,

With the light of Your love.

Shine into the lives of those afflicted by mental or physical illness.

Bring to wholeness those who are perplexed and confused.

Grant compassion to the carers and families.

Fill their hearts and minds,

With the light of Your love.

Shine into communities bombed and terrorised.

Transform minds full of hatred that they may rather crave peace.

Heal the hurts of generations, past and future.

Convict Your peoples with generous forgiveness.

Fill their hearts and minds,

With the light of your Love.

Blessing / Sending forth / Commissioning

Go into the world renewed by God's word.

We go empowered to do God's will.

Go into God's creation revitalised by this gathering.



We go renewed by this Sabbath worship.

Go into our community to do justice. **We go with fortitude and faith.**

Version 2

Go forth renewed by God's word, revitalised by this gathering, and renewed by this Sabbath worship.
Go forth to do justice with fortitude and faith.

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All – the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition launches on 19 May 2024. The book is available to order from https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all

This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

It will be released as full music version and words only books; and in due course digital resources including expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website; streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos.

Our <u>online music resource</u> is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the <u>Songs for Sunday blog</u> from Trinity College Glasgow.

Celebrating the magnificence of God's creation / rainbow of humanity (Psalm 139)

- CH4 96 "You are before me, God, you are behind" Based on Psalm 139
- "My God, my king, thy various praise" (Isaac Watts), while based on Psalm 145, it resonates with Psalm 139's enthusiastic praise.
 https://hymnary.org/text/my god my king thy various praise



Call, trust, obedience (1 Samuel, Mark)

- CH4 251 "I, the Lord of sea and sky" (Here I am, Lord) This hymn about 'call' might be sung before or after the 1 Samuel reading.
- CH4 502 "Take my life, Lord, let it be" A hymn of commitment, responding to God's call on our life.
- CH4 509 "Jesus call us! O'er the tumult" A hymn about call; especially for a service focusing on God's call to Samuel and God's call to us today.
- CH4 533 "Will you come and follow me, if I but call your name?" Appropriate for either before or after the 1 Samuel reading.

Perseverance, facing conflict, cultivating fortitude (Mark, Corinthians)

- CH4 530 "One more step along the world I go" Travelling with Jesus, following in the way of Jesus 'though the world is tough'.
- CH4 644 "O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end" A reminder of the promises of discipleship.
- CMP 192 "God of Grace and God of glory" A prayer for wisdom and courage.
- "Jesus the law breaker" (George Stuart, Australian hymnwriter) The lyrics present the bold Law-breaking Jesus and challenges us in our own Christian witness. Tune: Margaret
 https://sites.google.com/site/george007site/home/singing-a-new-song/volume-1-contents/jesus-his-life-and-mission/jesus-the-law-breaker
- "Seeker of Justice" (Jim Burklo) The lyrics creatively describe the many facets of Jesus. This hymn might be used before or after the Mark reading. If celebrating communion, include the final verse, or sing it separately as the communion invitational hymn.
 - https://worshipwords.co.uk/seeker-of-justice-new-words-to-fairest-lord-jesus-jim-burklo-usa/ Tune: Fairest Lord Jesus (Crusaders' Hymn: 5.6.8.5.5.8)

Reflecting the glory of God (Corinthians) – Powerful hymns for commencing worship

• CH4 111 – "Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty" – A familiar hymn bursting with praise and celebration to gather the faithful for worship.



• CMP 822 – "Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory cascades" (Alan Gaunt) – A familiar hymn celebrating the glory and love of God.

Total Acceptance; fully loved, Vulnerability & Intimacy (Psalm 139)

- "Great love" (Sam Goodman) This hymn, reminding us of God's expansive love, will work well before or after the Prayer of Confession.
 https://worshipwords.co.uk/great-love-hymn-sam-goodman-uk/
 Copyright free, may be used with acknowledgement of lyricist. Tune: In my life Lord be glorified (Bob Kilpatrick)
- "Love known" (Sam Goodman) This hymn, which describes many of the characteristics and virtues of God's awesome love, will work well before or after the Prayer of Gratitude.
 https://worshipwords.co.uk/love-known-hymn-sam-goodman-uk/
 Copyright free, may be used with acknowledgement of lyricist. Tune: Love unknown (Bob Kilpatrick)

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.



- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
 Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
 What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?
 Did it function well as a whole?
 How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?
 What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
 Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/community?
 How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
 How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship here

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online here



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