

THE SEASON OF CREATION: 6 SEPTEMBER 2020

From the Mountains to the City

Glenbrook Uniting Church & Pitt St Uniting Church

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE LAND

As our minds stretch to behold the endless horizon of the universe, so too, do we seek to name that for 60000 years Aboriginal people walked on this land in their own country. From the mountains to the city we acknowledge the traditional owners of the land. We honour the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and the Darug people of the the Darug nation on whose lands our churches have been built. We pay our respect to their elders, past, present and emerging as together we seek to be a reconciling people.

WELCOME

Welcome to the Season of Creation,
a time where we consciously locate and ground our faith in creation
and rediscover the gift and responsibility of being co-creators with God.

This year, when our world and its peoples feel so vulnerable and anxious,
we, the Uniting Churches of Glenbrook and Pitt St, have chosen to celebrate and
collaborate together as a sign of hope and care for one another,
And as a recognition that from the mountains to the city
we are all part of God's good creation and so we belong to each other.

We begin our worship by taking a deep life-giving breath together....

Noticing the ground beneath our feet...

Now placing one hand on our heart and the other reaching out beyond the screen or
towards the world - we share the Peace of Christ across time and space....

And we pray.

PRAYER OF AWARENESS

Light within all light

Soul behind all souls

at the breaking of dawn

at the coming of day

we wait and watch

Your light within the morning light

Your Soul within the humans souls

Your presence beckoning to us from the heart of life.

In the dawning of this day

let us know fresh shinings in our soul.

In the growing colour of new beginnings all around us
let us know the first light of our hearts.

Great Star of the morning

Inner Flame of the universe

Let us be a colour in this new dawning.

[from *Praying with the Earth: A prayer book for Peace* by John Philip Newell.]

SONG: 'Morning has Broken' by *Eleanor Farjeon*

Morning has broken like the first morning

Blackbird has spoken like the first bird

Praise for the singing

Praise for the morning

Praise for them springing fresh from the Word

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven

Like the first dew fall on the first grass

Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden

Sprung in completeness where His feet pass

Mine is the sunlight

Mine is the morning

Born of the One Light Eden saw play

Praise with elation, praise every morning

God's recreation of the new day

Morning has broken like the first morning

Blackbird has spoken like the first bird

Praise for the singing

Praise for the morning

Praise for them springing fresh from the Word

OPENING PRAYER

From the mountains to the city we praise you living creator.

We praise you for the miracle of life

and ask that you would open our eyes to its wonder and awe.

We see the seed that lay dormant

until brought to life by watering and feeding,

nourishment for each moment

We watch life breaking new ground

moving toward the light,

stretching out new leaves,

maturing into fruitful branches

generating seeds for the future.

Life, ever active, ever progressing
towards its purpose for being.

May our seeds of faith be just as alive:
brought to life with love, encouragement and hope
nurtured within the depth of our souls
to move towards the light of God's love,
to stretch out to all creation
to generate the blossoming of a future
enriching creation, community and ourselves.

[from the prayer, 'A Dance of Creation']

O God, from the mountains to the city, we celebrate your love for us this new day.
May we also remember our role in your creation.
May we be as faithful in our love to you and all you have created,
as you have been in your love for us.

Open our hearts to hear you in new ways
and open our minds that we may discover your will for our living. Amen.

SONG: 'Called By Earth And Sky' by Pat Mayberry

*Chorus: Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of Life, sanctified
Called by earth and sky*

1. Precious these waters endless seas, deep ocean's dream
Waters of healing, rivers of rain.
The wash of love again

2. Precious this gift the air we breathe, wind born and free
Breath of the Spirit blown through this place
Our gathering and our grace

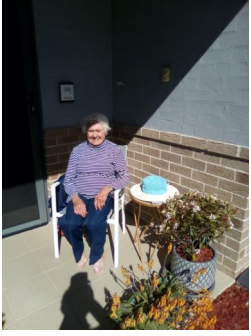
3. Precious these mountains ancient sands, vast fragile land
Seeds of our wakening rooted and strong
Creation's faithful song

4. Precious the fire that lights the way, bright dawning day
Fire of passion sorrows undone
Our faith and justice one

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND CONFESSION.

Creator God, we give you thanks and praise for
the places in our lives that bring us stillness and joy.
Places of rest and reflection and fun..





We give thanks for the majesty of our Blue Mountains home,
as we watch the landscape springing back to life after fire, flood, snow and rain....

Creator God we give thanks for our backyards and gardens

For that place where we lovingly nurture life and find ourselves nurtured in return. ...

For the patience and delight of a returning flower ...

For the Wollemi pine, thought to be extinct for thirty million years, now happily growing in the backyard.....

For winter roses, freesias, wattle and azalea and the many plants that are so well loved they become members of the family.

For the awe of the giant gum trees standing watch over our church and community.

Creator God, we give you thanks for this revelation of your diversity and beauty in our lives.

We pause now each one of us to reflect on what life giving - life breathing place calls to us this day....
Perhaps it's somewhere close to home or far away. A memory from childhood, a forgotten fragrance, a sanctuary from a sometimes harsh and cruel world.....

When we fail to stop long enough to appreciate the beauty of this world.

Forgive us.

When we dismiss or rationalise our failure to speak up for the living environment

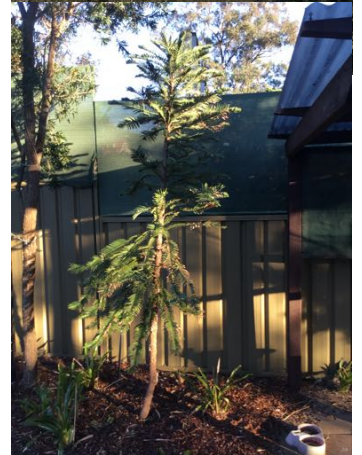
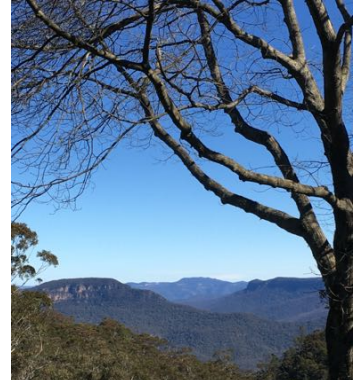
Forgive us

When we trample on your creation with our desire to satisfy our every want

Forgive us

Help us to see the impact we have on your creation in the way we live.

Help us to have the courage to face changing our ways, that we might live in relationship with all you have given us. Amen.



ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the Good News.

Our God of love forgives you.

Open our heart to receive that forgiveness
and find wholeness that you may be a source of wholeness for
others

Thanks be to God

STORY: "Where the Forest Meets the Sea" by Jeannie Baker

My Father knows a place

We can only reach by boat

Not many people go there and you have to know the way through the reef

When we arrive, cockatoos rise from the forest in a squawking cloud

My father says there has been a forest here for over a hundred million
years.

My father says there used to be crocodiles here

And kangaroos that lived in trees

Maybe there still are.

I follow a creek into the rain forest.

I pretend it is a hundred million years ago.

On the bank of the creek, the vines and creepers try to hold me back

I push through. Now the forest is easy to walk in.

I sit very still

And watch.

And listen.

I wondered how long it takes the trees to grow to the top of the forest!

I find an ancient tree. It's hollow. Perhaps aboriginal forest children played
here too.

I climb inside the tree.

It's dark,

But the twisted roots make windows.

This is a good place to hide.

It is time to go and find my father.

I think I hear the sea.

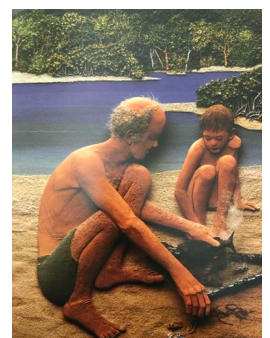
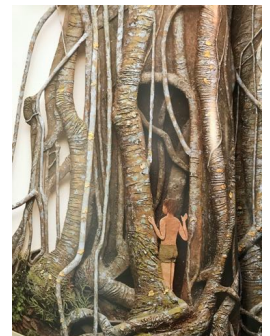
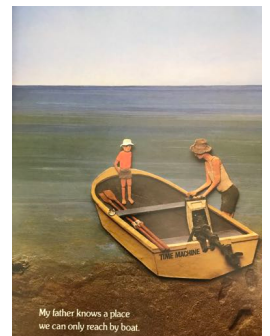
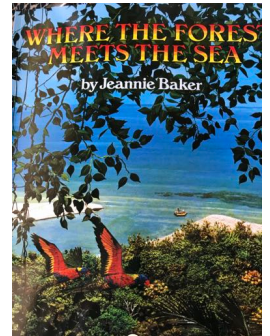
I walk towards the sound.

My father has made a fire

And is cooking the fish he caught.

I like fish cooked this way.

But then I feel sad because the day has gone so quickly.



My father says we'll come here again someday.
But will the forest still be here when we come back?

BIBLE READING Leviticus 25: 1-12

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

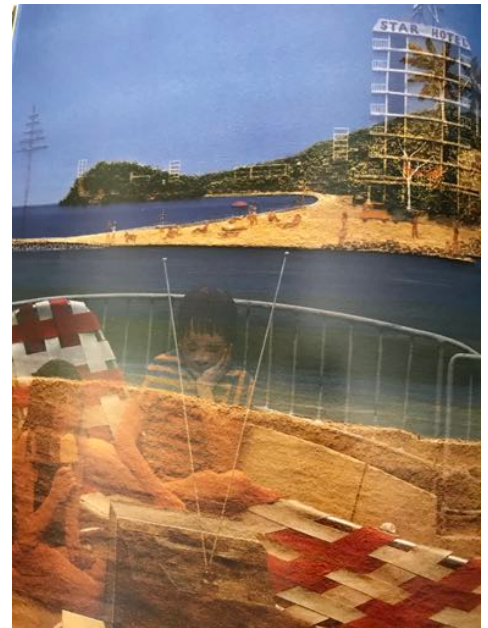
You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

SERMON: 'Creation's Sabbath' *by Prof. Mark Tjoelker*

This past summer bushfires raged down Australia's east coast, burning over 6 million hectares of native forest, threatening human life and property, destroying over 2500 homes and claiming at least 34 human lives and an estimated 1 billion native animals.

This past summer was one of the hottest and driest on record. Science tells us that our land and oceans are getting warmer. In fact, average temperatures in Australia have risen by over 1 °C over the past century. That might not seem like much. However, climate change has "loaded the dice" in favour of extreme weather conditions. In fact, today, we are six times more likely to experience record-breaking temperatures than just 30 years ago.

What is clear is that we humans are threatening the future of our land and our Earth. Our insatiable hunger for fossil fuels drives greenhouse warming and when coupled with vast changes in how we care for country, we are pushing our Earth to its very limits to sustain us.



Anchored in the ancient tradition of the sabbath among the Hebrew peoples, the passage from Leviticus read for us today provides a confronting, yet inspiring vision of rest, renewal and restoration of country.

Already in the creation narratives in Genesis, the writers mark a symbolic capstone of completion to God's creative work. God creates in six days, and on the seventh day God rests. It is in this hallowed day of rest, that all of creation is provided the space and time for renewal.

Like every seventh day of each week, every seventh year was to be set aside as time for rest, renewal and restoration. A "super sabbath" for all, if you will, and an impossible entire year long! The land was to lie fallow, no crops to be sown, no harvests to gather. But most importantly, all inhabitants...foreigners, slaves, servants, livestock and even wild animals are to cease their normal activities and depend upon creation itself for sustenance. Creation itself is honoured by rest and renewal.

Perhaps this reflects a universal truth? All of us are dependent upon creation, upon country, to provide our most fundamental need, the need for life-sustaining food. Where does our food come from? It is provided by fertile and healthy soils, from adequate water, from clean air and thus ultimately from the fundamental sustainability and productivity of creation itself. Importantly, sustainability is not ultimately not sourced from agricultural inputs and human ingenuity in shaping the environment for our use.

This sabbath, what a sacred and sacrificial act! Stop farming? Unrealistic! Depend upon wild sources of food to be shared with everyone including animals? Impossible!

I believe there is a deeper meaning in this text. Are we bold enough to stop and reflect to enable creation's renewal? The sabbath year is a universal gift to all and to creation itself.

But this isn't the end.

After seven times seven years, the sabbath of all sabbaths arrives, the year of jubilee. The year of jubilee is a both a proclamation and a celebration of liberty. Property was returned to the original owners, debts were cancelled, indentured laborers were set free. The jubilee is a prophetic witness to an economic reordering.

The rhythms of weeks and years mirror each other in a forward-looking and symbolic consummation of justice and peace...a yearning for Isaiah's peaceable kingdom. A kingdom in the here and now, but not quite yet. Perhaps it is no wonder that Jesus of Nazareth in the gospel of Luke is recounted as reading from the Isaiah scroll to embrace the Jubilee vision.

In this ancient wisdom can we find a prophetic message for our time?

Indeed, it is a confronting prophetic call to remember that the land, the country is not our own, but belongs to God. The land, air and oceans provision our planet with life-sustaining ecosystem services, many of which fall outside our economic systems that emphasize costings and profits.

Have we in our confidence in human ingenuity to solve all our problems and inexorable desire for economic growth and development forgotten Creation's sabbath?

I have something to show you. You may have seen cones like this on your bushwalks. This is the cone of a *Banksia* tree.



There are 173 different species of *Banksia* in Australia. All belong to the *Proteacea* family found only in Australia and Africa. The *Proteaceae* is an ancient group of flowering plants that evolved almost 100 million years ago on the southern supercontinent Gondwana. When Gondwana fragmented more than 80 million years ago, the proteas remained on the African plate, while the Australian genera remained here and evolved into a beautiful array of species in numerous habitats. Banksias provide nectar to numerous birds and small mammals and have long been a food source of indigenous Australians.

Banksias have evolved with fire and fire is embedded in their amazing life history. Each of these thick armoured follicles contain one

or two tiny delicate seeds. The follicles are a storehouse of seeds, sometimes for decades. When heated to just the right temperature, the follicles open and release tiny winged seeds that fall to the burnt forest floor where they will find the perfect conditions for germination, growth and renewal.

Perhaps this is a metaphor for creation's rest, renewal and restoration?

During this season of creation, I encourage you to stop for moment, look and listen. Can you see creation yearning for a sabbath jubilee? What does sabbath look like in your life?

Perhaps join the banksias and eucalypts in a joyous sabbath rest.

In the name of the ever-creating God, the Redeemer and Breath of life.

Amen.

BIBLE READING Proverbs 6:6-9

Go to the ant, you lazybones;
 consider its ways, and be wise.
 Without having any chief
 or officer or ruler,
 it prepares its food in summer,
 and gathers its sustenance in harvest.
 How long will you lie there, O lazybones?
 When will you rise from your sleep?

SERMON: 'Collective wellbeing: Seasons of Creation' *by Dr Miriam Williams*

Hi everyone, my name is Miriam Williams and I am a lecturer in Geography and Planning at Macquarie University. I moved to Glenbrook in December last year. Today I want to share a story with you inspired by reflecting on the 'Season of Creation'. There are two points to this story. Firstly, how we think about "creation" or nature matters. Sometimes the first step in changing the world is changing how we think about the world. And secondly, our wellbeing is bound up in the wellbeing of the whole of 'creation'.

The year was 2004 and it was my first year studying a Bachelor of Development Studies at the University of Newcastle. One of the first courses I took was Environmental Values and Ethics. The course looked at the causes of environmental destruction including science and technology, capitalism, patriarchy and religion, with a particular focus on Christianity and it followed this with some of the ethics that have developed as a response.

A particular week of note was week 3, which explored a 1967 essay by Lynn White titled "the Historical roots of our ecological crisis" which is now one of the most cited theological papers (that has also been heavily critiqued and contested). It argued that Western Christianity made it possible to exploit nature by revealing how the bible has been used to justify the right of humans to dominate and exploit nature. The lecture explored how interpretation of the verse from Genesis 1:28—"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and **subdue** it. **Rule** over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."— led Western Christianity into believing humans had the right to dominate and 'subdue' and 'rule' over nature. Christianity was said to be the dominant cause of ecological destruction as it allowed people to believe they were apart from nature and better than nature, rather than part of nature and so they could then exploit nature and destroy it. Now, some of these ideas can be traced also to Cartesian thinking etc and a whole range of other ideologies that I won't go into today. But we can see how this idea remains dominant.

As an 18 year old I was so confronted by this particular week. How could Christianity be to blame for ecological destruction? My experience of growing up in the Uniting Church had been of growing up in a faith tradition that was active on social justice issues, refugee issues, acting on issues of Fair Trade and climate change. I was mortified that

this faith tradition, which I knew had been implicated in many awful things already but in which I found so much hope, could also be to blame for playing a role in justifying and causing environmental destruction. In response, I wrote an essay critiquing this stance showing how Christianity was used as a political tool to justify the destruction of nature, that it wasn't the intent of the Christian faith but rather it was an interpretation of the scripture.

In 2012 whilst finishing my PhD I actually went on to lecture that same course. Again, I was confronted by this lecture that I was the one now to give. Years on, the content had been updated, but the argument relying on White's remained. I could now see examples of how this belief of the human right to rule nature was expressed in how people lived, both Christian and non-Christian. I could see examples in history, I had heard examples of this in theological reflections and in music sung in church which set humans apart from nature, as better than nature as a way to justify God's care of us. I began to see how this idea could justify environmental destruction as humans had interpreted it as permission to subdue and have dominion over nature.

But this was not the only story to tell because it was not the only story of the Christian church. In the lectures I presented additional stories, quieter stories, to sit alongside this uncomfortable interpretation and this uncomfortable history. I presented the work of Saint Francis of Assisi that was also mentioned in Lynn White's article, as a historical example of Christian theology that told a different story. St Francis's story is one of humans caring for and with nature, and seeing themselves as part of nature. I told the story of a more recent example of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change and Uniting Earth as groups of committed Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Bahai and Muslims that recognised the importance of caring for creation rather than exploiting it. There are many examples throughout history of communities of faith working to care for creation rather than exploit it. Now there are even more with a growing movement of people of faith who recognise the importance of caring for our world.

I ended the lecture on the point that Lynn White uses to finish his article -that if the problem is an interpretation of a religious text then perhaps there needs to be some type of religious-like solution to change how people see themselves in relation to nature. Perhaps we need to shift the way we think about creation as the first step to healing creation. If we see ourselves as apart from nature, rather than a part of nature, we are perhaps unattuned to the importance of caring for our world. Perhaps we have difficulty in seeing how our ability to collectively flourish is constrained when we do not care for our rivers, soil, animals and plants. It seems to me that this realisation could assist us in imagining and enacting a different future where we avert climate catastrophe.

Today, I wonder how many people have interpreted the bible as justifying ecological destruction, or would you be equally horrified to hear of such an interpretation? I think it is important to recognise the uncomfortable histories and sit with these so they can hopefully move us and change us. I also wonder how we might refigure such an

understanding of our collective role in this world as part of nature. Might we then see our wellbeing as bound up in the wellbeing of the whole of creation? Perhaps if this was the case, then we might find a way to recognise the intrinsic value of life and the beauty of our world in all its abundance enough, by the grace of God, to collectively do enough to save it.

SONG: 'Garden' written by Mikali Anagnostis (Leichhardt Uniting Church)

1. We're making a garden;
Were working the ground
In land that's bombed and torn,
Your love soaks through the soil,
new life can yet be born.
2. All welcome to the building;
all invited to the fruit.
On Earth, God's planned a garden;
every hand that's gripped a sword can make a plough-share too.

*Come, join the work; God's bringing life,
God's bringing life.
Hands in the same dirt;
enemies are one body now.
Come, sing new words; God's bringing life,
God's bringing life.
Lay down your swords; the wars you've learned are over now.
God turning our weapons into ploughs.*

3. Our hands won't be idle;
Our hearts won't grow cold.
In the barren ground be fore us,
We can see a garden, we can see a home.
4. Though drought is around us,
Though fires will come,
We've tasted the Harvest,
Our God has drawn us close,
Your love has made us one.

*Come, join the work; God's bringing life,
God's bringing life.
Hands in the same dirt;
enemies are one body now.
Come, sing new words; God's bringing life,
God's bringing life.
Lay down your swords; the wars you've learned are over now.*

*God turning our weapons into ploughs;
new life will come from death, somehow.*

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES

We are but a tiny speck floating in such vast emptiness of space.
Yet small as we are, we can proclaim with every fibre of our being
that God's love illuminated all of creation.

That in every time and place,
in every tear that falls,
in every giggle and smile
the radiant word and light of Jesus Christ, prays in us
and for us.

This is how we find our way in the darkness,
or the silence,
or the beautiful mystery of things.

We pray this day for all who are seeking sabbath rest and regeneration...

We pray this day for all who are facing an ending of one season of life, and the
beginning of another....

We pray for those who feel so small or insignificant that they cannot yet see their full
beautiful potential....

We pray for Pitt St Uniting Church,
your faithful people in the heart of the city.
May a new season of growing and sharing begin,
may they be wise and fruitful and brave.

We pray for the Glenbrook Uniting Church as we stand between the majesty of the
mountains and the promise of the plains.
May we too be wise and fruitful and brave as together we plant new gardens of faith and
friendship.

In all our joys and concerns, shine your radiant light.
Grow in us awareness of your presence always with us, in every season of our lives.
And may we carry this light, your presence, in our hearts and into places still waiting for
all things to be made new. Amen.

CELEBRATING THE LORD'S SUPPER

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,
And the Lord's glory covers the earth
as the waters cover the sea.
The trees of the wild clap their hands,
The birds of the air sing songs of praise

And if we should fail to express our worship,
Even the rocks and stones would cry out!

And so, we lift our hearts, and we lift up our voices
and we offer thanksgiving and adoration to the Lord
the creator of all.

Blessed are you, Sovereign of the Universe,
For the seeds sown in the earth
You have given us the gift of bread to feed and nourish us.

And at Jesus' last meal with his friends, before facing the cross,
Our Lord took bread, blessed it. And broke it.

This is my body, broken for you.

Take and eat, and do this to remember me.

Blessed are you, Sovereign of the Universe,
For the grapes which grow ripe and sweet on the vine,
You have given us the gift of wine to refresh and heal us.

And at Jesus' last meal with his friends before facing the cross,
Our Lord took the cup of wine and blessed it.

Then he passed it among them saying:

This is my blood shed for you.

Take and drink, and do this to remember me.

And now we come to your table in the world
mindful of how you laid your life down
so that we and creation could be born anew;
Mindful of how you took your life up again,
So that we and creation could be filled with the life abundant;
Mindful that we cannot earn or purchase this privilege,
but that it is your grace which beckons us,
and your grace which ensure that all creation may be one and whole.

May your Spirit work in these fruits of earth,
so that they may become for us a sharing in Christ's body and blood.

May your Spirit work in us, who are children of earth,
so that we may be transformed into Christ's body,
carrying his life, his care, and his salvation to all creation.

Christ is the bread of life,
food for healing and wholeness.
(Break bread)

Christ is the cup of hope,
wellspring of resurrection life.
(lift cup)

The gifts of God for the people of God.
With thanksgiving, let us feast together on all that Christ has given to us
(*Eat and drink.*)

PRAYER

Most gracious God,
you have made us one with all your people
in heaven and on earth.
You have fed us with the bread of life,
and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you,
and ask that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom.
May our love be your love,
reaching out into the life of the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

BLESSING: '*For You Deep Stillness*' by *Julie Perrin*

For you, deep stillness of the silent inland
For you, deep blue of the desert skies
For you, flame red of the rocks and stones
For you, sweet water from hidden springs.
From the edges seek the heartlands
and when you're burnt by the journey
may the cool winds of the hovering
Spirit soothe and replenish you.
In the name of Christ,
In the name of Christ