

The Power of Perspective

Sunday Worship Resources

Acknowledgment of Country and Call to Worship

We come together in this place,
from different places, different cultures, different understandings,
to meet in this space and on this land.

As we gather, may we take a few moments to become present.

(Short silence)

As we arrive,
let us remember that people have walked this land,
swum in the nearby waters,
foraged for food from the earth,
followed the stars,
and gathered to tell stories and sing songs for thousands of years.
We acknowledge the (name of local First Peoples) people,
the traditional custodians of this land,
and pay our respects to their elders, past and present.

As we come together to celebrate our different perspectives,
let us pay our respects to the First Peoples of this Country
and commit ourselves again to deeper listening,
ongoing reconciliation and continued learning.

Let us pray,
Loving and generous God,
we come before you bringing each of our unique perspectives.
Open our eyes and our hearts to you and to each other
that we may see and know you with more breadth and depth
through our time together.
Amen.

Hymn (Suggestions)

TIS 474 Here in this place

TIS 693 Come as you are

Opening Prayer of Thanksgiving and Brokenness

(This prayer could be read by a leader (plain text) and the congregation (bold text and italics) It could also be read antiphonally splitting the congregation in two halves, one reading the bold, the other the plain and the italics together.)

God of all shapes,
God of all sizes,
God of all colours,

God of all languages,
We bring you praise and thanksgiving,
We bring you honour and worship,
For the skies above, the stars, sun and moon,
For the earth beneath, rock, sand and lava.
For the birds that swoop, fly and glide,
For the fish that skim, swim and dart.

In the tiniest of ants,
and the grandeur of the blue whale,
we see your creation.
In the fragile wings of butterflies
and the mighty trunks of karri trees
we see your beauty and strength.

In the person with different clothes,
and the language we don't understand,
we experience your breadth.
In the food that is foreign
and the strangeness of cultural ways
we experience your depth.

For the times we close our eyes to the difference around us
for the times we turn away from people we don't understand
we are sorry, O God.

For the times we believe our way to be the only right way
for the times we tell others they are wrong before listening
we are sorry, O God.

For the times we judge quickly
for the times we discard swiftly
we are sorry, O God.

Bring us back to a curious place of seeing the gifts of others.
Bring us back to an open space of inviting different perspectives.
Open our hearts.
Open our eyes.
Open our ears.
Open our hands.
Amen.

Introduction to Theme/ Intergenerational Conversation

Option 1: Elephant Perspectives

There is an old parable about a group of blind men meeting an elephant for the first time that highlights the importance of different perspectives. One version of this story is as follows:

A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable". So, they sought it out, and when they found it they felt about it. The first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said, "This being is like a thick snake". For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said, the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said the elephant, "is a wall". Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.

To illustrate this story to your community you could find a large object that has different parts (similar to the elephant) and ask blindfolded volunteers to describe the object. You may like them to do this individually for a start and then share their description with each other to try and guess what the object is. This will demonstrate the significance in sharing our perspectives in a community to broaden our understanding and help us learn and grow together.

Option 2: Perspective on an Event

Invite three or four people who attended the same event to give a one-minute description from their perspective to the community. After their descriptions, invite the community to share what similarities and differences they noticed. Ask the questions:

When have you noticed someone having a different perspective to your own in recalling an event?

How does a person's perspective influence what they might choose to highlight?

We have four Gospels telling the story of Jesus. What differences and similarities do you notice between the Gospel stories?

Some points to help:

The Gospel writers include stories in a different sequence

Some stories are in all Gospels, some only one

Sometimes the details of the story or the characters are different

Hymn (Suggestions)

TIS 473 Community of Christ

TIS 468 We are your people

Readings

Luke 10: 38-42 – Mary and Martha

Matthew 15:21-28 – Canaanite Woman

Mark 14:3-9 – Woman anoints Jesus

Sermon Ideas - Three women, Three perspectives

In the chosen Gospel readings, we meet four women who encounter Jesus. In each case, the women bring their own perspectives through their individual experiences of Jesus.

The story of Mary and Martha is often controversial in church settings. Many women who work tirelessly to keep our faith communities ticking identify with Martha and feel

she is hard done by. If Martha was not working in the kitchen, preparing food or setting the table who would ensure that people were fed and cared for? Meanwhile, Mary sits at Jesus' feet, not lifting a finger.

These two women bring two very different perspectives and expressions of faith. Both are necessary. Both are valid. This story is not about busyness or even laziness. Jesus' comment to Martha is about being distracted. There are many things in our life that vie for our attention. Social media, the internet, our fast-paced lives, the lure of advertising all compete for our focus. How do we remain focussed on the one thing that is important?

Mary and Martha are both dedicated to Jesus, but Martha is scattered by the many things that need to be done. What is the one thing that needs our attention today? Perhaps it is an act of service. Perhaps it is sitting at the feet of Jesus. Neither is wrong, it is our attentiveness and presence to the one thing, the one perspective, for this time that is significant.

The story of the Canaanite woman is confronting. Did Jesus get it wrong? However, we interpret this passage, the story demonstrates a woman bringing a different perspective. She sees the situation differently and finds the courage to express her view. At times, being the voice of difference can be challenging. It can be difficult to speak up, especially if the other voices are stronger, louder or more confident. Voices of dissent, however, are extremely significant in our communities. Jesus was a voice of dissent, calling out injustices and advocating for the least, the last and the lost.

American social activist, Maggie Kuhn, is believed to have coined the phrase, "Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes". Offering a different perspective can make us feel vulnerable. Our heart may race, we may feel sweaty, our voice may just shake as we try to find the words. Throughout history, however, people's lives have been changed by people who see the world differently and are willing to speak up. We will never know exactly what happened for Jesus in this encounter with the Canaanite woman. We see in the story, however, that her sharing had an impact and affected Jesus' response.

The final story is one version of a woman anointing Jesus. In Mark's account the woman breaks open a jar of very expensive perfume and pours it on Jesus' head. Those present are quick to rebuke her for being wasteful. Often, when someone has a different approach to ours or an alternative way of doing things, we can become defensive and find a way to diminish the other. Anyone who has travelled to another culture will have experienced being confronted with ways of being that are other to us.

There are many ways for us to react to these different perspectives and ways of being. We can dismiss and marginalise the other or we can approach the difference with curiosity and openness to learn. In this story, Jesus defends the woman's action saying she has done a beautiful thing. He sees the action from a different perspective and even announces that her act will be remembered throughout the world.

These women, in encountering Jesus in their different ways, demonstrate aspects of the power of perspective. Knowing our own perspective and not being distracted by the whims of the world, being willing to speak up and share when the voices of others disagree, and having a curious and open mind to those different to us all invite us to a place of growth and learning. We learn so much about God, our faith and each other when we are willing to listen deeply to different perspectives. Our understandings of God are broadened and stretched as our own roots of faith sink deeply into our own knowing and perspective.

Hymn (Suggestions)

TIS 681 Lord, let me see

TIS 650 Brother, Sister let me serve you

Ways to Respond

Option 1: Faces

Print out a variety of faces on postcard size paper. The faces should include people of different cultures, ages, marginalised people etc. In other words, enough variety for people to see someone who would have a different perspective to them. Scatter the faces on the ground or on a table that is accessible to all people. Ask the community to choose the face of a person who they feel it would be difficult to talk with.

Invite people to spend 5-10 minutes with the face having an imaginary conversation. They may like to journal the responses. Encourage people to ask the face questions such as:

Who are you? Where is home for you?

What is your life story?

What are your strengths and where are you vulnerable?

Then ask the people to ask themselves:

Why was I concerned about meeting this person?

What have I learned about myself from speaking with this person?

Option 2:

Sufi Mystic Rumi, in one of his poems, says:

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
There is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
The world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*
Doesn't make any sense.”

When we find ourselves in the wide, open space of God our differences seem to fade into insignificance. Invite people to reflect on times in their life when they have been in the wide, open spaces of God. When we sink deep into the love of God our faith is not shaken by different perspectives, and we can remain open to what God may teach us in this space. You may like to use the song “One” by Birdtalker in a reflective time. This song contains the words of Rumi in the bridge.

Prayers for Others

There are two options for engaging people in the prayers for others. In both cases, be sure to invite rather than compel them to be involved. Give people the option of remaining in their seats and praying in silence. You may like to play some quiet instrumental music during the prayer time. Conclude the prayer time with the short prayer below.

Option 1: Lighting candles

Arrange a variety of candles – different sizes, different shapes and different colours – in a sand tray or placed on another protective base. Place the Christ candle in the centre of all the candles. Invite people to come forward and light a candle from the Christ candle. In doing so, ask people to think bring to mind a person or people who have a different perspective than theirs. Invite the people to pray for the person or people as they light the candle – not that their opinion will be changed, but for who they are as a child of God.

Option 2: Butterfly Painting

Have a large sheet of papers, folded down the centre on a table. Have a variety of colours of paint surrounding the paper. Invite people to come and place some paint of different colours on the page and as they do to pray for the people they know who are in need of God's love at this time. At the conclusion of the prayer time, fold the page and press the two sides together to form a "butterfly painting". Open the painting for all to see as you lead the final prayer.

God of all people,
we pray for those we push to the margins,
for those who differ to us in their thoughts, their passions and their actions.
Be with those we have brought before you today
and with all who feel lost, last or least.
We know you to be a God of compassion and unending love,
may we reflect your grace to all whom we meet
and with all who challenge us.
We pray in faith
Amen.

Offering Prayer

Loving and generous God,
you have given us so many gifts in life
and we are grateful.
We ask that you take these gifts we have given
and take our lives,
that we may be
your peace, love, hope and joy
in our community and our world.
We pray in hope.
Amen.

Hymn (Suggestions)

TIS 653 This is a day of new beginnings

TIS 547 Be thou my vision

Blessing

And now as we go into the world,
to meet and mingle with a kaleidoscope of people
may we know that we will meet the face of Christ in each one.

Let us go knowing that
the blessing of God,
Creator of diversity, Redeemer of all and Sustainer of love and hope
is with us this day and ever more.
Amen.

