

Worship Resource for Sunday July 12

For those who wish to have Worship at Home at their own pace (without Zoom)

The service starts on page 2. First, let's get ready.

Prepare your **meal** and your **space**.

Each week while we gather for worship in our homes, together yet apart, and we'll share our worship time over a meal or snack.

- Gather at your kitchen or dining table, with a laptop or tablet or a printout of this resource if you can. This allows you to participate with one another with space for your food and for you to write.
- In the middle of your table, place a candle and matches, your heart stone (see below), your study journal and extra paper to write on and something to write with.
- Your meal could be your breakfast or a light snack with a cuppa or juice.
- Make sure you can see a **colour** version of this week's artwork: *Restored* by Lisle Gwynn Garrity on page 8.

There are a number of **songs** which you may choose to listen to. You could take time now to click on the links so that they are ready to go (and so you don't need to wait for the ad to run during your time of worship).

1. Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dFfLt2Bd3o>
2. Open the Eyes of My Heart <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wutmEjdbedE>
3. And Can It Be <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQelGbKqiw8>

We are in the sixth week of the **unraveled** series which explores how we can press onward even when our tightly-knit plans unravel into loose threads. This series will take us through to the end of July. Households associated with Athelstone Uniting Church have received a study journal to go with this series. It includes original artworks and reflections to help in personal devotions or with a small group. The file is available on request for those who wish to print out a copy. (Please contact Carol – office@athelstonechurch.org.au).

As we continue to worship at home in this ungathered way, we invite you to continue to use a “**heart stone**”. This is a stone you can hold on to when you are feeling anxious or worried. It can be used for personal devotions and for our worship services. Use a stone large enough to hold in your hand and draw a heart on it. (*Psalms 62: 5-8*).



Worship

This service uses resources from the unraveled series by A Sanctified Art. Other sources are developed by Rev Linda Driver or acknowledged within the text below. With thanks to Di Curtis and Meg Edwards for their creative input.

9.30am Gather at your table with your meal and all the elements needed for worship, ready to go, as we join together in Worship at Home.

Do *you* ever feel a sense that your life is unraveling... getting out of control... falling apart? As you look at what is happening in the world, do you wonder the same? In this series we are encouraging each other to press onward *even* when our tightly-knit plans unravel into loose threads. In our unraveling, sometimes life surprises us with unexpected joy, love, and hope—with a new beginning we couldn't have imagined. Sometimes we need to be unraveled for God to be able to work in and through us.

Let us begin the holy unraveling by centering ourselves.

Spend Time

As we gather, perhaps for the last time in this way, across space and time - and connect, in spirit, take in a deep breath and remember that wherever you are, it is the same air that we are all breathing, the same Spirit who breathes life in to and through us. Even though we are physically apart right now, we are still connected in the communion of the Spirit.

Pick up your heart stone. Feel the roughness, the smooth places, the strength and the weight of the stone. Let our touch on its surface remind us that God's touch is within us, between us, and around us.

As close and real as this stone is in our hands right now, is how close *Love* is to us always.

Let us imagine letting go of our worries and our unraveling for now into God's heart of love.

Let's take one more deep breath. In and out.

Light candle

Light your candle then put it in a safe place nearby and set your heart stones next to it.

Call to Worship

God of mystery,

You called Ananias by name, and he responded,

"Here I am."

You called Paul to the work of your Church, and he responded

By giving his life to your Word.

Similarly, you call us into community and faith,

So we respond with love and time, energy and hope.

We respond with worship.

Let us worship the God of transformation and grace. **Amen.**¹

Break Bread

Blessing the Meal

One of the features of this time of worshipping at home has been our sharing of a meal together as we worship. We gather at our table this day, giving thanks for all the people who have contributed to our meals and remembering all those who struggle to find enough food to feed their families.

Let us bless our meal by praying ...

¹ Prayer by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

God of new beginnings,
we gather in your name, invited by Jesus, bound together with your Spirit, in union with each other.
Feed our bodies and our spirits with your comforting presence so that we might be your comfort to others. Bless
this food and break open our hearts. Bless this drink and pour out your love. Amen

Let us begin to “break bread” (eat) while we “break open the Word” in our scriptures.
Enjoy your meal!

Song

Let’s listen to Salt of the Sound sing **Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus**

Play this link if you are able: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dFfLt2Bd3o>

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of the earth
Will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace*

Breaking Open the Word with Scripture

Throughout this worship series we are exploring stories of unraveled shame, identity, fear, grief, dreams, and expectations. These are stories where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans—and us—into something new.

Today we’ll look at the conversion of Saul to Paul (Acts 9:1-20). In a flash in the middle of the road, God unravels Saul’s identity as a persecutor of Christ-followers and invites him to blindly stumble onto a new path. This new path later leads him to endure prison, persecution, travel, and trial. However, it also comes with new life, community, belonging, and hope. Sometimes God calls us into uncharted territory, and maybe our unraveling is simply a holy, fresh start.

I want to invite you to choose one of the following characters:

Saul one of the men travelling with Saul or Ananias

As you read, I invite you to imagine you are that character. Picture yourself in the story as that person.

Bible reading

Acts 9:1-20 New International Version (NIV)

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias.

The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God..

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Listen

As we begin to reflect on this story, let’s sing **‘Open the Eyes of my Heart.**

Play this link if you are able -words are on the screen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wutmEjdbedE>

Reflection

Open the eyes of my heart... I want to see you

The lyrics of this song are a cry out to God – help me to see as you see. Give me a heart for what you have a heart for.

I wonder... would this have been Saul’s desire too?

It’s important to remember that Saul saw himself as the good guy trying to protect the faith.

Let’s look at what was going on at that time.. The reading is set some time in the years AD34 to 40 - just a few years after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension. The apostles of Jesus have been spreading the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. The chief priests and the keepers of the Law were not happy about this message of good news and the disruption it was causing to their way of life, to religious practice and to the status of the Israel!

Reports that members of this new movement were teaching with new understandings of scripture was a threat to them. It could undermine their sense of identity and it would have caused outrage.

So they instructed the apostles not to teach in the name of Jesus. But the apostles still went ahead and were greatly persecuted for it. As they were persecuted they spread out across the lands and increased in number. The word was spreading about this new Way.

And then into the picture comes Saul. Saul loved God and wanted to stamp out anything that, in his view, dishonoured God. In this case, that meant the Jews in this new movement around Jesus, called ‘The Way’. As far as he is concerned, this is not a matter of going after people just to persecute them, but rather a correction of “Jews gone bad.”

Saul is the classic example of the devout person who is so determined to do good that they are blinded (literally!) to the destructive consequences of their purity campaign. He does much harm as he is trying to do good.

We must be careful, then, in how we portray Saul. Rather than portraying him as a persecutor, we might see him as a committed son of the covenant, someone trying to do the right thing in order to strengthen the people of God.²

If this was the case then Saul must have been shocked both by the flashing light and the accusation: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

We might imagine Saul can hardly believe his ears, thinking, "Who? Me? A persecutor?"

His vision had become so narrow that he had lost his 'vision'. He is so convinced of the error of others that he cannot see the new thing God is doing in Jesus Christ and mis-reads it completely.

This Damascus Road experience was a great unraveling.

Saul's blindness can help us see the ways that perhaps for some of us, our religious commitments, however righteous, can be obstructions. How do our religious (or political or ideological or social) commitments keep us from seeing the new thing God is up to? How do we narrow rather than expand God's mission in the world? What do we mis-read completely even though we have good intentions?

First, he had no vision, and had to depend on the help of those men who had been accompanying him. Can you imagine what that would have been like? Powerless, dependent, stumbling in the darkness, vulnerable. How much would he have learned in those 3 dark days?

What would it have been like for the men who were with him? They heard the sound but didn't see anyone. And then Saul lost his vision. What must they have been thinking as they guided Saul to Damascus?

And then for Saul to be helped by one of those who would have escaped from him previously - Ananias. (What grace!)

How much do we know about Ananias? There are a number of people in the Scriptures with the same name. We know that this Ananias was a disciple in Damascus. What we know from Acts 9 though is that Ananias, like Saul, received a call from Jesus in a vision. Jesus gave him specific instructions on what he was to do. And like many of those called by God before him, Ananias's response was to question God.

But, but... I've heard about this man... This is dangerous... I'm scared...

Like many God-encounters before, Jesus, persists and says, "Go!"

And then we hear what his call on Saul would be (as The Message paraphrase puts it):
"Don't argue. Go! I have picked him as my personal representative to non-Jews and kings and Jews."

In spite of his protests and his fear, Ananias responds to the call for him to Go..

Can you imagine how he felt as he approached that house? How he felt as he entered? How he felt when he approached Saul? His heart must have been pounding in his chest. Yet, he did as he had been told. He placed his hands on Saul, spoke the words he had been given and Saul could see again.

Saul's unraveling on the road to Damascus leads to a new vision which leads to a whole new journey on the way. Ananias's unraveling, leads to an openness to what God might be up to –

² Amy G. Oden

and through whom God might be working.

The grace of God softened enemies with closeness and connection.

The story of Saul and Ananias invites us to look at our own world with new eyes. Like Saul's and Ananias' new vision, God rearranges our ways of seeing, being, and acting. God changes our world.

How do we imagine what God is doing? Where God is leading us? What will be our response when God says to us, "Get up and Go, because I have chosen you and am commissioning you for the life of a new community?"

As we return to life in the 'new normal' I invite you to look with new eyes.

As we gather to worship onsite, together once again, I invite you to look around with new eyes.

Is God calling us to see with fresh vision? Is God calling us into something new?

How are we being called into joining God's creative work of transformation in our community?

Paul saw himself as a prime example of amazing grace – let me read what he wrote later to the believers in Corinth:

“ the Messiah died for our sins, exactly as Scripture tells it; he was buried; he was raised from death on the third day, again exactly as Scripture says; he presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died); he then spent time with James and the rest of those he commissioned to represent him; and he finally presented himself alive to me. It was fitting that I bring up the rear. I don't deserve to be included in that inner circle, as you well know, having spent all those early years trying my best to stamp God's church right out of existence. But because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I'm not about to let his grace go to waste.” (1 Cor 15 MSG)

Open the eyes of my heart... I want to see you

I pray that where ever you go, wherever Christ sends you, near or far, you will go looking through the eyes of Jesus, your vision transformed with grace-coloured glasses, just as Saul's vision was transformed through his amazing encounter with Jesus on that road to Damascus. Amen

Prayer of Confession

God of new life,

What would we give to have you appear with a flash of light and a clear voice like you did for Saul?

Maybe then, our doubts would disappear. Maybe then, we would live as you called us to live.

However, when our lives depend on faith, we forget your surprising grace.

Instead, we draw lines around enemies and friends, who's in and who's out.

We see the "other," faster than we see our "neighbour," and refuse second chances.

Pull the scales from our eyes. Help us see as you see. Help us live as you live, and forgive us when we fail to.

Humbly we pray, Amen.³

Hear these words of grace:

This is the best of all:

when we are empty, God fills us;

when we are disheartened, God is compassionate;

when we are wounded, God brings healing;

when we confess our sin, God forgives.

³ Prayer by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

In Christ, through Christ and because of Christ, our sins are forgiven.⁴

Thanks be to God. Amen

Artwork

Take some time now to reflect on the artwork on the next page "*Restored*" by Lisle Gwynn Garrity.

Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook? Let's take a few minutes to do this.

Breaking Open our Lives with Discussion

Let's take some time now to break open our hearts by sharing our thoughts. You may wish to journal and share these thoughts with God in prayer. If you are in a household with others, you might choose to talk for a few minutes. Choose one of the following to reflect on now.

- What did you see in the artwork?
- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- As you listened 'through the eyes' of Saul, the men who accompanied him or Ananias, what did you notice?
- Have you ever had anything happen to you that helped you see with new eyes?
- Throughout your life, what identities, beliefs, or practices have you shed? How has unraveling from former patterns and identities helped you to grow or become more whole?

⁴ Declaration from Uniting in Worship 2



“Restored” by Lisle Gwynn Garrity | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Breaking Open Our Hearts with Prayer

We are going to spend some time in prayer. As we think about our own lives and of the world around us, we can think of many things, people and circumstances unraveling. Let's spend a moment in silence, bringing those thoughts before God in prayer.

Creator God, we meet to give you praise and worship. Each one of our homes can be called Beth-el, the house of God: Hear us as we now try to pray from our place and in the world for it is all your world. We praise you for the beauty of the world and we worship you that we are able to see it as it is – your creation.

We pray for all those we meet as life slowly changes to a new normal, especially those for whom it means vast changes to life and work. We pray for the vast networks of support that all may discover the help needed. We pray for..

- the 1.4 million Australians who are currently relying on emergency relief from community service agencies like Uniting Communities and UnitingCare.
- international students struggling financially and isolated from their families
- every volunteer who is helping to serve those who are in great need of food, shelter and clothing right now.
- the people of Victoria, as they face six more weeks of tight restrictions to prevent further spread of COVID-19. We pray for those who are distressed, those who are living with uncertainty and fear
- and we pray for all Australians, that we might have wisdom, patience and love for neighbour to remain vigilant in our hygiene and safety practice until the threat of the virus passes.
- the Medical HQ team as they run the COVID-19 Respiratory Clinic on our premises.
- people seeking asylum in Australia and their families, that they may receive the supports they need to assist them through the COVID-19 crisis.
- our global neighbours who are facing the pandemic without the privileges we enjoy as a rich, developed nation.

We pray for all who have found isolation during the pandemic hard, life difficult, and health problematic; for those who mourn, who despair, and who suffer. For those we know and can name in the silence of our hearts; for those we don't know but know about, and for those worldwide who suffer.

- For those we know who are struggling with ill health.
- For those recovering from medical procedures or facing one in coming weeks.
- For those struggling with mental illness, addiction, chronic pain and other health conditions
- for young families – new babies, babies on the way, children and grandchildren on school holidays, Uni students on break
- for all those preparing for our onsite service on July 19

We pray, giving thanks for the things we have rediscovered this year: the beauty of silence and bird song; the letting go of busy, over-committed lives; the time to savour in many ways the gifts of word, speech, and friendship; the time to be in your world as your house. This is your world, all things are made by you and for your glory.⁵

We thank you that we can bring these prayers to you, knowing that you hear us. Amen.

⁵ www.worldinprayer.org

Let us take another breath of Spirit as we say another “Amen” together.

We know that God sends out our prayers and that the Spirit, Breath of God, is blowing from within us outward, as a Spirit of Compassion and Presence. Amen

Have Goodwill

As we think of how we can respond to this story of transformation, let us think about what action we can take for others. How can we join in the transforming work of God in the world and offer love and support to others?

Uniting Communities Eastern Services Emergency Relief Food Appeal

Please continue to give to the Uniting Communities Eastern Services Emergency Relief Food Appeal.

Please continue to gather food and other grocery donations. Brenton Summers can either collect them from your front door or they can be left on his front doorstep. Cash donations will also be received with great thanks. Thank you to all those who have so generously been donating goods and cash.

Community art project



As part of this series, we are developing an “unraveled” community art project at the Church. We invite you to add and weave into our art project... not just a strip of fabric or yarn but you may also like to write on your strip of fabric and weave in your hopes, dreams and prayers as well. **You can do this as often as you like.**

Offering

All that we are, and all that we have is first a gift from God. Our offering to God is from the fullness of all we have received, from the depth of our hearts. Let us give of our offering with grateful hearts.

Pray: Generous God, you reach out to us with hands of love. We offer these gifts and ourselves and ask that they be used to extend your offer of love, care and justice for all of creation. Amen

Song

Let’s sing the hymn “**And Can It Be?**” Play this link if you are able -words are on the screen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQeIGbKqiW8>

Study Journal

This week we invite you to spend time reflecting further using your study journal. Turn to “The Conversion of Saul to Paul”, on pages 23-26. (See page 1 of this resource for more details about the Study Journal.)

Next Week

We look forward to gathering with you onsite next week.

For those who are unable to join us, there will be 2 ways to be able to worship at home, or wherever you might be: You can connect through a ZOOM link and participate in the worship service that is taking place onsite in the church building or you can access a lectionary based self-guided resource that will be available for the time being. Details about these options will be highlighted in our weekly newsletter.

Benediction

As you go into a new week, know that whatever is happening for you,
and whatever unraveling might be happening for you:
God blesses you with strength for the journey;
Jesus walks beside you;
and the Spirit guides you with dreams and visions of a glorious tomorrow.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.. Amen!

Candle

Extinguish the candle and watch the light change from a flame to smoke, like God's Spirit that we carry with us now.

Spreading Joy

For those of you who are on social media, please take a photo of your lit candle and post it online.
#churchconnected #churchungathered #unraveled

Worship Playlist

Here is a collection of songs you may like to listen to as you continue on in worship this week

Amazing love	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avJ4IDnZWRU
And can it be	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQelGbKqiw8
Blessed Assurance	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDeiy9-t2GE
Open the Eyes of My Heart	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wutmEjdbedE
Turn your eyes upon Jesus	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5X85txs60yY
or	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWxb6VvPrkE
or	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dFfLt2Bd3o
What a Beautiful Name	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5L6QIAH3L4
You rescued me	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXzYYGMdxWk
Your love has lifted me	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ4xkBNRwXc

Further Worship Ideas

Here are some more ways that you can connect with God's Word and respond:

- The Synod of South Australia has published a **full list of online congregations and resources**. <https://sa.uca.org.au/documents/resources-board/Being-the-Church-in-Ungathered-Times.pdf>
- The Centre for Music Liturgy and the Arts has a **collection of Resources** available here: <https://www.cmla.org.au/resources/worship-in-times-of-isolation/>
Including **Prayers, Poems and Guided Meditations** and
Worship with your backyard: <https://www.cmla.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Worship-With-Your-Backyard.pdf>
Worship on the sofa: <https://www.cmla.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Sofa.pdf>
- The Assembly are **live-streaming services**: <https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/3158-livestreaming-on-assembly-platforms>
- Tune in to **radio station 1079 Life Together on Life**, Sunday 10am. Join 1079 Life's Kit for music and a message or two from great local pastors each Sunday. <https://1079life.com/>
- **Songs of Praise** – a TV show with inspiring hymns and songs, together with uplifting stories of faith from around the UK and beyond is available on ABC TV and ABC iView

Contemplative resources

- You might like to try going for an intentional prayer walk around your community: http://www.gungahlinuniting.org/?p=5369&fbclid=IwAR28tWeqlqfxcNPazMlpYJ99AUGapmXrMVQP_MiOiSQKeT-y8fVsf4rn0fKl
- Prayers and Meditation Resource from Stillpoint Community: <https://stillpointsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/11/Living-from-the-Stillpoint-Oct-17-mod.pdf>