

# 'You are witnesses of these things'

(Luke 24:48)

## DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 16 MAY—23 MAY 2010



In the 2010 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we are encouraged to reflect each day on chapter 24 of Luke's gospel stopping at the questions Jesus' asks to his disciples and those they ask of Jesus. Each of these questions highlights a particular way of witnessing to the Risen One, and invites us to think about church division and about how, concretely, we can remedy that. The materials were produced jointly by the WCC & the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, drawing on Scottish churches' experience. Adapted here for Australia, they seek to deepen our unity in Christ.

DAY 1—SUNDAY 16 MAY

### Celebrating Life

*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*  
(Luke 24:5)

**Genesis 1:1. 26-31** *God saw all that he had made, and indeed, it was very good*  
**Psalms 104:1-24** *O Lord, how manifold are your works.*  
**1 Corinthians 15:12-20** *If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised*  
**Luke 24:1-5** *Why look for the living among the dead?*

#### Reflection

Our journey of Christian unity is firmly grounded in our common belief that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ - we celebrate not only the life God has given us but the offer of new life through Jesus' conquering death once and for all. As we meet together during this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we witness to our shared faith by our concern for the life of all. Life is God's gift to us, and the more we support and celebrate life, the more we give witness to the one whose generous love brought us to life initially. Our way of living on our planet often seems far away from this!

The reading from the book of Genesis reminds us of the creative power and energy of God. It is this that St Paul encounters in experiencing Jesus' resurrection. He challenges the people of Corinth to put their total trust in the Risen Lord and his offer of new life. Similarly, our gospel passage challenges us to look for new life in the face of a culture of death that our world frequently presents to us. It encourages us to trust in Jesus, and so to experience life and healing.

#### Reflection questions

1. *To what extent do your own witness and the witness of your church celebrate life?*
2. *Will others know from our witness that Christ has been raised from the dead?*
3. *What do you understand by the resurrection and see as the areas of growth in your life?*
4. *What things of the past which churches cling to ought to be laid to rest because of a new ecumenical consciousness?*

#### Prayer points

- \* Give thanks for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and for the Churches in Scotland
- \* Give thanks for all those who witness to the resurrection in the midst of destruction and pray for those who bring life out of death
- \* Pray for the national & state ecumenical bodies in Australia, the World Council of Churches and other global networks
- \* Pray for the unity of all Christians and the healing of life on Earth

#### Prayer for the Day

God our Creator,  
we praise you for all who give witness to their faith by their words and actions. In living life to the full we encounter your loving presence in the many experiences you offer us. May our common witness of celebrating life unite us in blessing you, the author of all life. Amen.



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission

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**DAY 2—MONDAY 17 MAY**

## Witness through Sharing Stories

**Jeremiah 1:4-8** *Go to all to whom I send you*  
**Psalm 22:23-end** *You who fear the Lord, praise him!*  
**Acts 14:21-23** *They strengthened the souls of the disciples*  
**Luke 24:13-17a** *What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?*

*What are you discussing with each other while you walk along? (Luke 24:17)*

### Reflection

Sharing our stories is a powerful way in which we give witness to our faith in God. Listening to one another with respect and consideration allows us to encounter God in the very person with whom we are sharing. In Australia, storytelling is also embedded in the cultures of our first peoples.

The reading from Jeremiah offers us a powerful witness of God's call to the prophet. He is to share what he has received, and so allow God's Word to be heard and lived out. This call

to proclaim God's Word is also experienced by the disciples in the early Church, as witnessed to in the reading from Acts. Our psalm allows us to sing to God with a spirit of praise and thanksgiving. Today's gospel passage then further presents a Jesus who enlightens our blindness and dispels our disillusionment. He helps us to understand our stories within the one unfolding plan of God.

During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we listen to the faith stories of other Christians in order to encounter God in the variety of ways God's very self is revealed to us. We are aware also that we can share with others through the virtual reality of technology. Modern means of communication can help us share more widely, and so create a community that is broader and more extensive than the purely physical. In listening with attentiveness we grow in faith and love. In spite of the diversity of our personal and collective witness, we find ourselves intertwined in the one story of God's love for us revealed in Jesus Christ.

### Reflection questions

1. Are you "gossiping the Gospel" or just gossiping?
2. How open are you or your church to be drawn into the stories of others?
3. How open are you to share with others your stories of faith,  
*and to give witness to God's presence in your personal experiences of life and of death?*
4. In what ways do modern means of communication have enormous potential to offer the Church today?
5. How are we listening to the stories of our fellow Australians, especially Indigenous people and refugees?

### Prayer points

- \* Give thanks for today's prophets of peace who unceasingly pray, speak out and witness for peace
- \* Pray for the work of Christians in the media and for all other Australian ministries of communication
- \* Pray for all those involved in technological development and for its wise and just use
- \* Pray for the churches of Africa & the All Africa Conference of Churches
- \* Pray for those who find their home in the Anglican and Mar Thoma Churches



### Prayer for the Day

God of history, we thank you for all who have shared their story of faith with us and so have given witness to your presence in their lives. We praise you for the variety of our stories both as individuals and churches. In these stories we see the unfolding of the one story of Jesus Christ. We pray for the courage and the conviction to share our faith with those with whom we come into contact, and so allow the message of your Word to spread to all. Amen.



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**24 MAY—31 MAY 2010**

**DAY 3—TUESDAY 18 MAY**

**Witness  
through  
Awareness**

**1 Samuel 3:1-10** *Speak, Lord, your servant is listening*  
**Psalm 23** *The Lord is my Shepherd*  
**Acts 8:26-40** *Philip proclaimed to him the Good News about Jesus.*  
**Luke 24:13-19a** *...their eyes were kept from recognizing him*

*Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days? (Luke 24:18)*

**Reflection**

Growing in faith is a complex journey. Many people in our world today lead busy lives and have many pressures and responsibilities. It is easy to miss God's revealing love to us in our everyday life and experiences. The more pressure and activity we surround ourselves with, then the greater the possibility of overlooking what is in fact before our very eyes. Like the two disciples in the gospel, we sometimes think we know what is real, and try to explain our view to others, yet we are not aware of the full truth. In our world today we are invited to be aware of God in the surprising and unlikely events of life.



In our Old Testament reading, we hear how God calls and invites Samuel to bear witness. Samuel first of all has to hear this word. Hearing requires an open disposition and a willingness to listen to God. This desire to hear God's Word is also experienced by both Philip and the Ethiopian in the reading from Acts. They witness to their faith by responding to what is asked of them at that precise moment. They listen attentively and respond accordingly. Similarly, the psalm of the Good Shepherd reflects the quiet trust of the one who is aware of the tender care of God, who gathers the flock and leads them to green pastures. Meanwhile, in Australia, the very land is a vehicle of God's Spirit. During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we seek to be aware of God in our everyday events and experiences. We meet people who are familiar and others who are strangers. In these encounters we learn from each other's spiritual experiences and so get a new view of God's reality. This awareness of God's presence challenges us to work for Christian unity.

**Reflection questions**

1. *When have you been aware of God's presence in your life?*
2. *Are you aware of global celebrations and tragedies, and how might our churches together respond to these?*
3. *Is being aware enough, or is there something more that you might do in order to give witness to your faith?*
4. *How do we make ourselves aware of God when the reality of God's presence does not correspond to our expectations?*

**Prayer points**

- \* Give thanks for God's presence in our world and for all who help to open eyes and ears to the truth of Christ
- \* Pray for the work of religious orders, places of listening and for all ministries of contemplation
- \* Pray for the churches of North, Central and South America
- \* Pray for those who find their home in the Salvation Army and in the Society of Friends

**Prayer for the Day**

Lord Jesus, Good Shepherd,  
You encounter us  
and remain with us in everyday life.  
We pray for the grace  
to be aware of all you do for us.  
We ask that you prepare us to be open  
to all you offer us and bring us together  
in one flock. Amen.



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**DAY 4—WEDNESDAY 19 MAY**

## Bearing witness through celebrating the faith we have received

**Deuteronomy 6:3-9** *The Lord is our God,  
the Lord alone.*

**Psalms 34** *I will bless the Lord at all times.*

**Acts 4:32-35** *Of one heart and soul.*

**Luke 24:17-24** *But we had hoped...*

*"What things?" They replied, "The things  
about Jesus of Nazareth." (Luke 24:19)*

### Reflection

We have an enormous debt of gratitude to those whose faith has provided the foundation for our Christian lives today. Numerous men and women through their prayer, witness and worship have ensured that the faith is handed down to the next generations. In Scotland there is for example an impressive Christian history, including Saint Ninian in the 4th century, Saint Columba in the 6th century and the many Celtic saints whose faith was rooted in the love of God and wonder at his creation. The faith of Scottish people can also be seen in the very important role Scotland played in the Reformation of the 16th century and the way this spirit has been firmly maintained since.

Today's readings affirm the importance of supporting the community of faith in order to ensure the dissemination of the Word of God. The passage from Deuteronomy gives us the beautiful prayer of our Jewish sisters and brothers who every day use these words to praise God. The extract from Acts reveals a community united in faith and charity. The gospel passage shows us Jesus as the centre of what we have received in faith.

As we unite with our Christian brothers and sisters in praying for unity during this week, we welcome the rich variety of our Christian heritage. We pray that awareness of our common heritage may unite us more closely as we progress in faith. We celebrate also those Australians who have also shared God's Holy Dreaming and, like Mary MacKillop, continue to inspire others today.

### Reflection questions

1. Who has inspired you in your faith ?
2. What are the aspects of faith which inspire you in your everyday life ?
3. What do you feel were the most important teachings which were passed on to you ?
4. How can you recognize God at work with you  
in the transmission of faith the future generations ?
5. How do we celebrate our faith beyond the church walls?

### Prayer points

- \* Give thanks for those who have shared the faith of God with us and for the holiness in the lives of our Christian ancestors
- \* Give thanks for the work of bible translators, teachers and evangelists and for all those pass the faith on to others today
- \* Pray for the churches in Asia and the Christian Conference of Asia
- \* Pray for those who find their home in the Roman Catholic Church



### Prayer for the Day

Lord God, we give you thanks for all the people and communities who have communicated the message of the Good News to us, and thus given us a solid foundation for our faith today.

We pray that we too may together bear witness to our faith, so that others may know you and place their trust in the truth of salvation offered in Jesus Christ for the life of the world. Amen.



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**DAY 5—THURSDAY 20 MAY**

**Witness  
through  
suffering**

**Isaiah 50:5-9**     *The one who vindicates me is near.*  
**Psalm 124**         *Our help is in the name of the Lord.*  
**Romans 8:35-39**   *God's love shown forth in Jesus Christ.*  
**Luke 24:25-27**    *He interpreted to them the things about himself.*

*Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory? (Luke 24:26)*

**Reflection**

In recent years two events in Scotland led to this small country suddenly grabbing the notice of the world's media. The bomb attack on the plane above Lockerbie and the massacre of children in Dunblane school brought attention to this nation which will always remember these terrible losses of human life. The two events caused suffering and unimaginable anguish to a large number of people and the consequences were felt well beyond these two places. Innocent people met their death in horrifying circumstances. Equally we can think in Australia of similarly harrowing events, especially when we reflect on the destruction of Indigenous people and culture.



The reality of suffering is something that the Prophet Isaiah speaks about forcefully in today's text, reminding us that God is never resigned to seeing humanity suffer. Similarly the letter to the Romans proclaims the certainty that love is always strongest and that suffering and sorrow will never prevail. For before offering the resurrection to the world, Christ entered into a terrible death and into the dark depths of the tomb so as to be completely with us at our very lowest ebb. In the Lord's footsteps, Christians who seek full unity show their solidarity to those amongst them who are confronted in their lives with tragic situations of suffering, by confessing that love is stronger than death. And that it was from the extreme humiliation of the tomb that resurrection came like a new sun for humanity; a clamouring annunciation of life, forgiveness and immortality.

**Reflection questions**

1. *How can we show empathy to those who suffer and are in difficulties?*
2. *What wisdom and deeper understanding have you gained through suffering you have known in your own life?*
3. *How do you live out solidarity with the suffering and oppression which so many people living in poverty in our Indigenous communities and wider world experience?*
4. *How can we bear witness to the mercy of God and to the hope you find in the light of the cross of Christ?*

**Prayer points**

- \* Give thanks for the power of God to bring new life out of suffering and tragedy
- \* Pray for the witness of Christians in situations of great suffering and for greater solidarity with them in the Body of Christ
- \* Pray for the churches of Aotearoa-New Zealand and the Pacific; for the Pacific Conference of Churches
- \* Pray for those who find their home in the Churches of Christ

**Prayer for the Day**

God our Father, look with compassion on our situations of poverty, suffering, sin and death. We ask you for forgiveness, healing, comfort and support in our ordeals. We give you thanks for all who manage to see light in their affliction. May your divine Spirit teach us the greatness of your compassion and help us stand alongside our sisters and brothers in difficulty. Filled with its blessings, may we in unity proclaim and share with the world the victory of your Son who lives for ever. Amen.

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**DAY 6—FRIDAY 21 MAY**

**Witness  
through  
faithfulness**

**Isaiah 55:10-11**    *The word that goes forth from my mouth does not return to me empty*  
**Psalm 119:17-40**    *Open my eyes that I may see the wonders of your Law*  
**2 Timothy 3:14-17**    *All scripture is inspired by God*  
**Luke 24:28-35**        *Jesus opens the Scriptures to His disciples*

*Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us? (Luke 24:32)*

**Reflection**

Christians encounter God's Word in a privileged way through reading the sacred Scriptures and celebrating the sacraments. In faithfully listening to the proclamation of Holy Scripture, and by prayerfully reading the various books of the Bible, they open their hearts and minds to receive the very Word of God. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to help his disciples understand the Word of God, and guide them in all truth.



Historically, Christians have been divided in reading and understanding the Word of God. The Bible has been used to emphasise disagreement rather than to find ways for reconciliation. Fortunately, in recent times, in the search for unity, sacred Scripture has brought Christians closer to one another and shared Bible study has become a major means of growing together. Indeed many Churches today rejoice in the use of a common lectionary and texts.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God's Word powerfully proclaimed is indeed effective and operative. It does not return to God empty but succeeds in the purpose for which God sent it. This message is repeated in the words addressed to Timothy, as he is directed to believe in the efficacy of the Scriptures by which the faithful are equipped for every good work. Our psalm gives praise for God's words and statutes and implores God to give understanding, that we may keep the Holy Law with our whole heart. During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we therefore pray that all Christians may enter more deeply into the mystery of God's wonderful revelation as it comes to us in Holy Scripture. We beseech the Holy Spirit to help us better comprehend the Word of God and to direct us on our common journey of faith until all are gathered again around the Lord's one table.

**Reflection questions**

1. *What are the passages of Scripture that mean most to you?*
2. *Who or what makes your heart burn with a passion for the gospel and a desire to give witness to Christ?*
3. *Which passages from the Scriptures have helped you to understand the witness of other Christians?*
4. *How may our churches use the Scripture more effectively in their daily life and prayer?*

**Prayer points**

- \* Give thanks for the Word of God encountered through Scripture
- \* Pray for a deeper sharing of Scripture among Christians
- \* Pray for the churches of Europe and the Conference of European Churches
- \* Pray for the Lutheran, Chinese Methodist and Uniting Churches and those who find their home in them

**Prayer for the Day**

God, we praise and thank you for your saving Word as it reaches out to us through the sacred Scriptures. We thank you too for the brothers and sisters with whom we share your Word and discover together the abundance of your love. We pray for the light of the Holy Spirit, so that your Word may lead and direct us in our quest for greater unity. Amen.

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**DAY 7—SATURDAY 22 MAY**

## Witness through Hope and Trust

**Job 19:23-27** *God whom I shall see on my side*  
**Psalm 63** *My soul thirsts for You*  
**Acts 3:1-10** *What I have, I give you*  
**Luke 24: 36-40** *The disciples were startled and terrified*

*Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?*  
(Luke 24:38)

### Reflection

During the journey in life and faith, all Christians experience moments of doubt. When Christians cannot recognise the presence of the risen Christ, being together sometimes makes doubts even heavier, rather than lighter. The challenge faced by Christians is to continue to believe that even when we do not see or feel God, God remains with us. The virtues of faith, hope and trust allow us to give witness that our faith goes beyond our own possibilities. Perhaps it is this hope that it is most needed in our world of climate change and its effects.



The character Job gives us an example of someone who faced difficult trials and tribulations and even argued with God. In faith and hope however, he believed that God would remain on his side. This reliance and conviction is also shown by the actions of Peter and John in the account with the lame man as told in Acts. Their belief in the Name of Jesus allows them to witness powerfully to all who were present. Today's psalm is a prayer reflecting our deep desire for God's steadfast love.

Meeting during this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity allows our communities to grow in shared faith, hope and love. We bear witness to God's steadfast love to all people, and God's faithfulness to the one church we are called to be. The more we witness together, the stronger our message will be.

### Reflection questions

1. How do you deal with your own fears and doubts and how might you be a cause of anxiety for others?
2. What are the ways of talking about and understanding God which lead to dispelling fear and anxiety?
3. When have you faced up to your own fears and doubts  
*and so given witness to your faith in Christ by overcoming these difficulties?*
4. How may Christian communities encourage one another in faith and hope?

### Prayer points

- \* Give thanks for the love of God which holds us fast in the midst of the doubts and darkness of the world
- \* Pray for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; for the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission and Indigenous Christian ministries; and for fresh hope, healing and trust in national, community and personal journeys of healing and Reconciliation
- \* Pray for elected leaders within Australian Governments, leaders within all spheres of community life, and all public servants.
- \* Pray for those who find their home in the Pentecostal tradition and for churches who are observers or friends of the NCCA

### Prayer for the Day

God of hope, share your vision of the one church with us, and overcome our doubts. Increase our faith in your presence, that all who profess belief in you may worship together in spirit and in truth. We especially pray for all who are in doubt right now, or whose lives are spent in the shadow of danger and fear. Be with them and give them your consoling presence. Amen.



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**DAY 8—SUNDAY 23 MAY**

## Witness through Hospitality

**Gen 18:1-8** *Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves*  
**Psalms 146** *He who gives justice to the oppressed and gives food to the hungry*  
**Romans 14:17-19** *Pursue what makes for peace and mutual edification*  
**Luke 24:41-48** *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures*

*Have you anything here to eat?*  
(Luke 24:41)

### Reflection

Today, electronic communication has made us neighbours in one small and overloaded planet. As in Luke's day, many peoples and communities have had to leave their homes, journeying to strange lands. People of the world's great faiths have arrived bringing new beliefs and cultures to our communities.

In the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we recognise in our shared journey towards unity the hospitality and companionship of Christians of all churches. Christ also calls us to both offer and to receive the hospitality of the stranger who has become our neighbour. Surely, if we cannot see Christ in the other, then we cannot see Christ at all.

The story in Genesis describes how Abraham receives God in offering hospitality to strangers. The God of all creation also stands with the prisoner, the blind, the stranger. The text from Romans reminds us that the kingdom of God comes about through justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The resurrected Christ brings his disciples together, eats with them and they recognise him again. He reminds them of what the scriptures said about him and explains what they did not understand before. Thus, he frees them from their doubts and fears and sends them out to become witnesses of these things. In creating this space for encounter with him he enables them to receive his peace, which implies justice for the oppressed, care for the hungry and mutual upbuilding as the gifts of the new world of the resurrection. Just as Christians throughout history have found the risen Lord as they have served and been served by others in faith, so we too can encounter Christ when we share our lives and our gifts.



### Reflection questions

1. To what extent is Australia hospitable to the stranger?
2. How in your own neighbourhood can the stranger find hospitality and a space to live?
3. How can you show gratitude for hospitality?
4. How does the cross show us that God's hospitality is a hospitality lived out in total self-giving?

### Prayer points

- \* Give thanks for the diversity of peoples, languages and cultures,
- \* Pray for a renewed spirit of hospitality to strangers among us
- \* Pray for churches in the Middle East and for the Middle East Council of Churches
- \* Pray for those who find their home in the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, & the Assyrian Church of the East.

### Prayer for the Day

God of love, you have shown us your hospitality in Christ.  
We acknowledge that through sharing our gifts with all we meet you.  
Give us the grace that we may become one on our journey together and recognise you in one another.  
In welcoming the stranger in your name may we become witnesses to your hospitality and your justice Amen.

This resource is based on the international material for the 2010 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which originated with the Scottish Churches. and was agreed by the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. It has been adapted for use in Australia by the Faith and Unity Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia. For more information: ph. (02) 9299 2215 or visit [www.churchestogetherinprayer.org.au](http://www.churchestogetherinprayer.org.au)