



WE ARE CHURCH International

Saturday, 12 September 2026

Theme: Sentinel, what of the night?

Facilitators: Elsa F. & Roberto F.

🎵 **Opening song: Ngiyakubona**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_6jpPx2zPU

“Ngiyakubona” means “I see you” in isiZulu.

It is the simple message that every person deserves to be seen, welcomed and to have a place.

Facilitator

Dear sisters and brothers, welcome!

With the opening song, we expressed our joy at seeing each other again, at finding shining eyes, at having a shared space where we can feel awaited and welcomed. With the same joy, we gather in the best community of Love, which is Father and divine Ruah.

Do we all have a little bread, some wine and a small candle with us? Let's keep it there; we'll light it later.

We would like to share with you in this celebration some insights from two and Mother, Son wonderful gatherings we attended over the summer. The seminar organised by the Coordination of Italian Women Theologians on Lake Garda centred on the theme: *Guarding the Thresholds*, and drew on this passage from Isaiah.

Reader 1 PATRICIA M.

Isaiah 21:11-12

¹¹ The oracle concerning Dumah.

One is calling to me from Seir,

“Sentinel, what of the night?

Sentinel, what of the night?”

¹² The sentinel says:

“Morning comes, and also the night.

If you will inquire, inquire;

come back again.”

Facilitator

The biblical scholar Sister Grazia Papola commented on this passage with words that struck a chord with us.

Reader 2 MARTIN S.

The oracle is one of the most enigmatic and mysterious passages in the Bible. It is thought to be set towards the end of the Babylonian exile. The mention of Dumah and Seir refers to the region of Edom. It is the Edomites who ask the prophet-watchman how much longer they must wait to be freed from the Babylonian yoke, symbolised by the night. The watchman replies that the approach of morning offers a glimmer of hope, but the return of night extinguishes that hope and signals that oppression continues. He concludes, however, by urging them to keep asking the question and to 'come back', which in Hebrew can mean 'to convert, to repent', 'to change one's way of life'. But there are some interesting variations in interpretation:

- *Dumah* and *Seir*, as well as denoting places, mean in Hebrew 'silence' and 'hurricane' respectively. One might therefore translate it as: '*Oracle of silence. He cries out to me from the hurricane*'. Both are figures that recur in the First Testament to denote the manifestation of God (think of Elijah on the mountain).

- The Hebrew word *shomer* means not only 'watchman' but also 'guardian'. It is the same word used by Cain when he says: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'. The sentinel is therefore one who, by observing and keeping watch, safeguards, practising a form of care that embodies brotherhood and sisterhood even towards those furthest away, even towards those who lie beyond one's own boundaries.

Reader 3 PAUL U.

- Whilst in other languages, such as Italian, the translation of the question to the watchman is: 'Sentinel, how much of the night remains?', thus referring to the duration of the night, in Hebrew the sentence lacks a verb, so it literally sounds like this: '*Sentinel, what of the night? Sentinel, what of the night?*'. The question is strictly focused on the here and now, on the present moment, and its meaning could be expressed as follows: 'Sentinel, what is happening this night? Is there any news?'.
 - 'Morning comes, then night follows; if you wish to ask, ask; turn back, come!'.

In the 'today' of the night, the prophet challenges his listeners to explore the night, which remains a place of wisdom for discerning the meaning of a message. The night is a favourable time to ask questions and embark on a journey back to the essential. The night thus presents itself as a decisive time and place for discernment, far from the clamour and noise of human activity.

The three verbs in succession – ask, turn back (repent), come – point to a path to be followed throughout the night. It begins with the questions to be asked, which is the opposite of providing answers. The questions are followed by the process of conversion, which is a journey. The 'come' indicates a destination. A light is kindled in the night: a dawn within the darkness.

Let's take a moment of silence.

🎵 De noche iremos (Taizé)

<https://youtu.be/WjhhM5dz4FA?si=4YF7XuJP953trO41>

At night we shall go, at night: to find the spring, only our thirst guides us (Spanish).

Facilitator

Our second point of inspiration comes from an ecumenical training week we attended between July and August at the picturesque Benedictine monastery of Camaldoli, nestled in a beautiful forest in Tuscany. The theme of the week was: *Churches in a Secularised World: An Ecumenical Perspective*. The theologian Lucia Vantini spoke to us on the topic of *A Different Kind of Sacred: Expressing Life*.

Reader 4 HUGO C.

A man is tending another man's flock in the desert when he sees a bush burning but not being consumed (Exodus 3). We are all familiar with this scene. I would like to focus on just one detail: the order in which events unfold. First comes a gesture: 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground'. Moses is not asked anything; he is told to take off his sandals, and only afterwards, barefoot, does he sense what that ground contains: 'I have seen the misery of my people, I have heard their cry, I know their sufferings'. So here, the sacred does not present itself as an aura surrounding a bush: it is a cry that can only be heard barefoot.

Reader 5 COLM H.

For a long time, we have been telling a very straightforward story: modernity advances, religion recedes, the sacred fades away. But that story has been disproved by facts even before it was challenged by theories. In some respects, we are witnessing a 're-enchantment' of the world, for better or for worse. A secularised world offers plurality, critical thinking and the framework through which we can now unmask certain symbolic – but also practical – games through which we have sacralised patriarchal, religious and political power. And the most significant transformation in all this is that the religious framework which administered the sacred has crumbled. There is a fraying of religions, a loss of relevance. And this is also an opportunity for us. The sacred can now be recognised where it has always been – in life itself – because the sacred is its very essence, not merely an ornament. As long as there is life, there is the sacred.

And this also explains that 're-enchantment' which the statistics record without really knowing what to call it: a more intimate spirituality, a more personal, more individual, more immersive spirituality, recognisable above all in the younger generations.

Reader 6 MAEVE W.

I call upon three voices.

They are three women; none of them is speaking from inside a church, but all three say, each in her own way, the same thing: the sacred constitutes life, it is the source of life, it lies within life, it is the depth of life. The first author is **Simone Weil**, who puts it most succinctly, saying:

"In every human being, from early childhood to the grave and despite all hardships, the experience of crimes committed, suffered and witnessed, there is something that invincibly yearns for good and not for evil. Whenever that childlike cry – which even Christ himself could not hold back – rises from the depths of the human heart: 'Why are you doing me harm?', there is certainly an injustice there". Good is the sole source of the sacred. The sacred lies within life as a form of expectation of good.

Reader 7 PATRICIA M.

The second voice is that of **María Zambrano**, who provides this insight with a generative foundation. She says: “The sacred lies within life”, and calls it “a dark placenta”. All of reality is sacred, but you perceive the sacred, you experience it, you recognise it where something new is brought into being, where life passes from darkness into light. It is a Paschal perspective, albeit expressed in different terms. In Christianity there is a hidden side that women have often picked up on – not to resort to essentialism, but because sometimes, from marginal positions, threads are woven together that are less visible in the light of day. For a man, blood is almost always a sign of a wounded or sick body, and this is why Christianity has also become a religion of sacrifice linked to blood as wounding, as death, as vicarious atonement. For a woman, blood is first and foremost a promise of life, and the rules of purity have taken as their measure that anxiety to control the power of life, which has ultimately neutralised the generative meaning of this experience. And so, without realising it, we have internalised the idea that blood serves to signify the atonement for one person’s wrongdoing on behalf of another.

From this reflection, I draw the challenge to dissolve the logic of sacrifice – the offering that appeases, the gift that imposes an obligation, the blood that atones – in favour of another logic of sacrifice, that is to make sacred that which in our life is the energy that produces novelty, that makes lives flourish and that generates justice.

Reader 8 SOLINE H.

And the third voice I am bringing in is that of **Julia Kristeva**, a non-believing psychoanalyst, and I am including her because she levels a very specific accusation against Christianity. It is a sort of reproach for the ‘squandering of the sacred’. In Christian narratives – she argues – sacred narratives are preserved: stories of love, stories of suffering, stories of horror that originally found a fruitful symbolisation within Christianity. But – she says – we Christians no longer realise this: we have developed a sort of habit that has dulled our perception of this sacred matrix of words and stories.

And so her diagnosis is this: what has dissolved isn't a legacy of beliefs, it's what we might call a process of processing: processing a trauma of the God we can no longer see. We need to clear our eyes, purify our hearts, redo certain gestures. So she says: "We have lost the sacred energy of profound stories that helped us express what happens to us, especially the most radical experiences".

And we can say: the sacred is the matrix of life. The problem is that we no longer have words, and this matrix is a mute matrix. The sacred is life, but it has become mute. And so we are alone, with our trauma to process, which is the trauma of the presence of a God we can hardly forcefully intercept, recount, share.

Let's take a moment of silence.

♪ La ténèbre n'est point ténèbre (Taizé)

<https://youtu.be/jVBMrUGjvKc?si=qMA7Z6dVEAPPfRxN>

Darkness is not darkness before You. Night, like day, is light (French).

Facilitator

"Sentinel, what comes from the night?"

Can we name the nights we are experiencing today, at the level of society and the Church?

Do we see any glimmer of dawn?

In this "night," where can we find the sacred? What do we think of the affirmation that the sacred is within life?

We ask anyone who takes the floor to light their little candle in front of the screen. Even if we do not wish to speak, we are invited to light our candle to bring some light to this night...

Open contributions**Facilitator**

Listening to the sacred that speaks from our lives, from our bodies, we offer you this profession of faith, written by a Baptist pastor, Lidia Maggi.

We would like to suggest reading it in alternating voices: first the women, then the men.

Women: We believe in God, who created us capable of giving and receiving love. We believe that our bodies speak of His/Her glory and that the caresses, kisses and embraces of those who love are His/Her favourite sanctuary. We believe that our bodies, so fragile and beautiful, are essential to embodying our faith. We do not believe in a faith that denies the body at the expense of the spirit. We dare to believe that, in the unique experience of those who love by giving their all, there lies the divine seal.

Men: We believe in Jesus Christ, who is the body of God amongst us. Born of a simple woman, he lived, rejoiced and suffered, just as we do. He came to free our bodies from the chains of moralism and religious asceticism. He came to heal our paralysis and teach us the dance of life. His body was violated, tortured and outraged by political and religious powers. But the tomb became the cradle of life raised up, resurrected. That life to which we are all destined.

Women: We believe in Ruah, who, like a little girl's body, can't sit still. She moves, plays, dances, and creates new things. She loves the outdoors, gardens, and fresh fruit. She's not afraid of getting dirty while running about. She loves to take refuge in the kitchens where women prepare special desserts for the feast.

Men: We believe that the Church is a reality of redeemed, free bodies, liberated from feelings of guilt. A community capable of welcoming and celebrating the many manifestations of love. We believe in the power and energy of our sexuality, which opens us up to the mystery of life renewing itself.

Facilitator

We now want to share the prayers that come from our hearts. To each invocation, we respond:

Lord, let us take off our sandals, and hear our cry.

Facilitator

And now, let us all together celebrate the memorial of the Supper (let us read slowly, together):

Send, Lord, your Ruah to enliven these gifts, that they may be for us food of life and hope, just as they were for the first disciples, the men and women who accompanied Jesus on his journey.

For on the night he was betrayed, whilst they were eating, he took the bread, said the prayer of blessing, broke it, gave it to his community gathered round him and said: ‘Take this; this is my body’.

Then he took the cup of wine, said the prayer of thanksgiving, distributed it, and they all drank from it. Jesus said: “This is my blood, poured out for all; with this blood God renews his covenant”.

As we remember Jesus of Nazareth, we commemorate all those who, like him, have struggled to secure spaces of dignity and liberation. In doing so, they encountered the inhuman face of power, which cannot tolerate free and masterless spirits.

By breaking this bread, we propose to share "pieces" of our lives, our time, our energies, in the knowledge that there is no "loss" in this "breaking," but rather the joyful discovery of other hands, other faces, other paths.

As we savour the fragrance of this bread and this wine, we remember that the earth belongs to God and that its fruits are given to us freely, as a gift.

Now, since we are the Body of Christ, let us eat bread and drink wine together whilst listening to a song: it is a tribute to a great Italian singer-songwriter, Francesco Guccini, who passed away on August 6th. The song is inspired by the verse from Isaiah that we have been reflecting on, in Hebrew: ‘Shomer ma millaylah? Shomer ma millel?’: ‘Sentinel, what of the night?’.

♪ Shomèr ma mi-llailah?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEr9wwXKrfM>

Facilitator

Father Giovanni Vannucci, a Servite theologian, wrote:

Aramaic does not know our subjunctive; its tense is the present: we should not read "your kingdom come," but "your kingdom is coming," not "your will be done," but "your will is done," not "give us today our daily bread," but "you give us the bread of today and tomorrow". What we have translated until now as requests to the Father are actually affirmations of faith; Jesus himself says so: "Your Father in heaven knows very well what you need; there is no need to ask!". So let us say together:

Our Father, our Mother, who art in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom comes, your will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

You give us the bread of today and tomorrow.

You forgive our debts the moment we forgive those who sin against us.

You do not abandon us to temptation, but in temptation you deliver us from evil. Amen.

Facilitator

We now wish to give and receive blessings. Let us hold hands virtually. The left hand has its palm facing upwards, to receive; the right hand has its palm facing downwards, in the act of giving. This reminds us that no one is so poor that they have nothing to give, and no one is so rich that they have nothing to receive. Let us recite this prayer together (slowly), which comes from Zimbabwe:

Open my eyes so that they may see the deepest needs of the people.

Move my hands so that they may feed the hungry.

Touch my heart so that it may bring warmth to the desperate.

Teach me the generosity that welcomes strangers.

Grant that I may share my possessions to clothe those who are naked.

Grant that I may join in the struggle for the liberation of prisoners.

For it is by sharing our anxieties and our love,

our poverty and our prosperity,

that we share in your divine presence.

Amen.

Facilitator

Let us bring this celebration to a close and return to the first form of worship, which is Life itself, in communion with our sisters and brothers from other Churches, with *Abide with me*, a famous hymn written in 1847 by the Scottish Anglican vicar Henry Francis Lyte. We present it to you in the new version prepared during the Covid pandemic – it's a bit of a shock to see the face masks we had to wear back then in the video... – with lyrics that express our commitment to helping God transform, revive and heal society, like little lights in the night, as we await the Kingdom.

♪ We seek your Kingdom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Lp2mMpSa1E>