## Third Sunday of Easter – Year C

## Sunday 4 May 2025

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank candidates for ministry, Susan Morrison, Val Rose, William Gibson and Elliot Mitchell, and Very Rev Martin Fair, Pathways to Ministry Manager, for their thoughts on the Third Sunday after Easter.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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## Introduction

It is a joy to those of us in the People & Training Team – and surely to the whole Church! – that God is still in the business of calling people to ministry. It's a further joy that there's no 'one size fits all' when it comes to the kind of people God calls. As Heinz would say, there really are 57 varieties! God calls all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds, each with their own story.

There's nothing new here. We can trace it back to Abram or, in New Testament terms, to Peter, Andrew, James and John – the first ones to respond to the calling of Jesus on the shores of Galilee. But, yes, isn't it good that people are still sensing that call to follow Jesus and, in some cases, to pursue a calling into the particular ministries of the Church?

On Vocations Sunday we have this in mind, as we worship God with glad and grateful hearts. We give thanks for those who are exploring call, those who have responded to it and are now in training and those who are now exercising their ministries across Scotland and beyond.

It is fitting that those who have produced the material for this Sunday are themselves all presently training for ministry and that they have worked on this collaboratively – surely a healthy approach and one that will increasingly, become a mark of the Church in the coming days.

## Acts 9:1-6

When was the last time you visited the opticians for an eye test? One of the moments which always catches me off guard is when the optometrist invites you to sit on a chair, look at a letter chart and then you are left to attempt to try and repeat back the letters on the chart, whilst at the same time, trying to make headway of what the actual letters are (especially if you are someone who is unfortunately blessed with not-so-clear eyesight and who happens to wear glasses daily).

Just as how placing lenses during an eye test can give us a refreshed perspective on our vision, here is a creative and metaphorical approach to how it can relate to Saul's response to his newfound, clearer perspective on his call and new direction in his life, as demonstrated through Christ's intervention.

#### Starting with blurred vision

When we visit the optometrist for an eye test, we might not realise how poor our vision has become. We've adapted to the blurriness around us, thinking it's normal. Similarly, Saul believed he was seeing clearly—he was zealous for God, but his vision was spiritually distorted by his perspective.

#### Initial surprise

For some of us, when we start the eye test and try to read the letters out loud, it can be a daunting experience. It can make us feel tense and unsettled. Likewise, when Saul experienced blindness, he experienced unsettledness to the point where he fell to the ground. God's call can be a flustering experience at first, especially when it is unclear where God is showing us to look.

### The moment of revelation

The eye test involves adjusting and placing lenses, thus revealing how much we've been missing. Sometimes, we don't know how much clearer we *could* see until the right lenses are placed before us. In the passage, Saul's physical blindness mirrors his spiritual state. Jesus interrupts his path, stripping away his faulty vision, so that Saul can receive new sight—not just physically, but spiritually.

### Receiving the right prescription

The optometrist refines the prescription, testing which lenses bring clarity and clearness. God does the same in our lives by placing the right 'lenses' in our sights. These may be through experiences, scripture, and conversations with people – all helping us to see our calling more clearly. Ananias acts as a guide, like an optometrist, assisting Saul in regaining his vision and stepping into his new identity and calling as Paul.

### Walking with new clarity

Once we have the right prescription, we can see and witness God's call on our lives more clearly. Likewise, after Saul's encounter and healing, Saul is no longer blinded by his old ways, but steps forward with a new mission, seeing Christ's calling clearly and able to walk forward in a new path that Christ has called.

Just like how we occasionally have to visit the opticians to check if our eyesight is more precise than what we first imagined it to be, perhaps God might be showing you a calling in your life by inviting you to place some new lenses? Maybe God wishes to sharpen your vision of where a new path might lead you to? As daunting as it can be, maybe God is asking you to trust where a particular calling might lead you towards? If these questions start to make you think that somehow there's that feeling of curiosity or itch, place the 'glasses' of faith to where God might be leading you to, and see things with renewed clarity.

## Psalm 30

Often, when we approach the Psalms in preparation for Sunday worship, we choose to use them in prayers, calls to worship, or to highlight the poetic elements present in the text. However, Psalm 30 touches on a theme which many of us can relate to, and one which can be preached from, especially just two Sundays after Easter. This psalm is one of praise for deliverance and the overriding metaphor present throughout is that of going down into death, silence, despair, the pit, and being raised by God to life, praise, healing, and joy.

This psalm speaks to our experience of living – the fluctuating moments of despair and deliverance, grieving and glorifying, death and life. I am sure many of us can relate to the feeling of being in a pit, whether emotionally, financially, with our mental health, with our calling, or with our career. We are reminded here of the possibility of life coming from death; that in some sense, the pattern of life is one of death and resurrection.

For me, when I read this passage, I could not help but think about the ways in which my life has fit this pattern. I had a sense of calling to ministry as a teenager, which I then lost in my early twenties after a period of doubt and uncertainty. However, when I reconnected with my faith, that dream and sense of calling came to life in a new way for me. Despite the difficulties of that period, where it felt like my faith was dead, I have been surprised by resurrection and found joy in living out what I believe God is calling me to now.

Even if we can't think of personal examples which relate to this Psalm, there are many other stories, parables and passages in scripture which map well onto this Psalm. The prodigal son's journey away from his father's house and the celebration of his return (Luke 15:11-32); Joseph left in a pit and sold into slavery, only to be found again in a moment of need (Genesis 37:12-36; Genesis 42); the one lost sheep whose shepherd threw a party when the sheep was found (Matthew 18:10-14; Luke 15:1-7); the disciples seeing Jesus go down into death, only to discover joy in the morning of the third day when the tomb was empty and they encountered the risen Jesus for themselves (Luke 23-24).

Interestingly, the mentions of the divine names in this Psalm, "Lord" and "God" add up to twelve, which is the number of the tribes of Israel, suggesting the healing and deliverance that is being celebrated in this psalm is both individual and communal. I am reminded of the words in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, "if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). The moments of suffering and of blessing described in this Psalm are not one-off events, but are a continuous part of the lives of our worshipping communities.



## Revelation 5:11-14

#### The butterfly metaphor

The transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly beautifully mirrors the themes of transformation, worship, and the power of the Lamb expressed in Revelation 5:11-14. Just as the caterpillar undergoes a radical change to become something new, we, too, experience a profound spiritual transformation through the work of Christ—the Lamb who was slain.

#### The beginning: the caterpillar's hidden journey

The caterpillar begins its journey hidden in the leaves, humble, slow-moving, and seemingly ordinary. It is in this hidden phase where its transformation begins, much like the hiddenness of Jesus' suffering. Just as the caterpillar is largely unseen during its early stages of growth, Jesus' sacrificial work was initially hidden from the world, a quiet, painful act of transformation that one day would be revealed to all creation. In Revelation 5:11-12, Jesus—the Lamb who was slain—is shown as the One worthy of all worship and praise.

The caterpillar's hidden transformation speaks to God's often unseen work in us. We may not always see it happening, but through our relationship with Christ, we are being slowly and purposefully transformed.

Just as the caterpillar eats, grows, and prepares for its change, we, may also go through seasons of growth and preparation, where we do not yet understand the full extent of God's plan for us. But as with the caterpillar, God is preparing us for something greater.

#### A complete transformation: from crawling to soaring

The caterpillar undergoes a seemingly invisible transformation when it enters the chrysalis stage. Similarly, Revelation 5:11-12 shows a moment of cosmic revelation when all the heavenly beings finally recognise Christ's ultimate worthiness. Jesus, who appeared weak and humble in His suffering on the cross, is now seen in all His glory —worthy to open the scroll, worthy of praise.

The butterfly's emergence from the cocoon, now with wings to fly, mirrors our transformation through Christ. When we encounter Jesus—through His death and resurrection—we can 'fly', rise above the world's struggles, and live a life of freedom and purpose.



In the same way, the worship in Revelation 5 elevates Christ, showing that He is no longer bound by death but reigns in glory. Through Christ's work in us, our lives, too, are elevated from the mundane to the magnificent.

#### The beauty of the transformation: reflecting God's glory

As the butterfly's wings are beautiful, intricate, and uniquely patterned, so is Christ's transformation in our lives. Revelation 5:13 speaks of every creature in heaven and on earth praising Christ, recognising the beauty of His redemptive work.

Just as each butterfly has unique markings, each transformed believer uniquely reflects God's glory. The beauty of the butterfly's wings reminds us that transformation isn't just about change—it's about becoming something more beautiful than we were before. Christ's work in us doesn't just make us different—it makes us more glorious, reflecting His beauty.

In our spiritual transformation, we are made beautiful in God's sight, revealing God's love, mercy, and grace to the world. Our purpose is not only to be transformed but to allow that transformation to radiate beauty and light to those around us. This is the kind of worship that Revelation 5 depicts— a cosmic beauty and harmony that reverberates throughout all creation.

#### A symbol of hope and resurrection: the butterfly's life

The butterfly's fleeting life, after emerging from the cocoon, is a reminder of resurrection. Just as the caterpillar 'dies' in the cocoon and appears in a new form, Jesus' death and resurrection bring us new life. Revelation 5:12 declares that the Lamb is worthy of power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory, and blessing —because of His death and resurrection.

There may be dark moments of trial or brokenness in our lives, much like the caterpillar's time in the cocoon. But in Christ, we are given the hope of resurrection. Our struggles and hardships are not the end of our story. We are resurrected through Christ's transformative power into a new life, as the butterfly rises from the cocoon to fly.

For those who feel stuck, broken, or hopeless, the butterfly symbolises hope—the promise of new life and transformation. Even in the darkest moments, God is at work within us, bringing about a change that will lead us to freedom, beauty, and purpose.

#### Connection to our spiritual journey: the process of becoming

As the caterpillar's transformation takes time, so does our spiritual metamorphosis. Before we know Christ, we might feel like the caterpillar —limited, burdened, and perhaps unaware of what God is preparing us for. But when we encounter Christ, we transform, just as the caterpillar enters the chrysalis.

This process of transformation involves growth, struggle, and change. It's not always easy. It may feel like we are being 'broken down', like the caterpillar inside the cocoon. However, just as the caterpillar undergoes a necessary and miraculous change, we too are being changed by the Lamb —slowly, often unseen, but powerfully.

Just as the Creator designed the butterfly, God created us for transformation. In Revelation 5, Jesus is revealed as the Creator who is worthy of bringing about the ultimate transformation for all of creation. Through God's work, we are being recreated and transformed into new creations who reflect the Creator's image.

#### The role of the Creator: trusting the process

Finally, the caterpillar's transformation is a work of the Creator. The caterpillar cannot transform itself—its change is directed and designed by the Creator. In the same way, our spiritual transformation is a work of God, who is the One who shapes and refines us, bringing us from death to life.

The worship in Revelation 5 speaks to this Creator's worthiness. Jesus, the Lamb, is worthy of worship and praise because He is the Creator and Redeemer who transforms everything. Just as the caterpillar trusts the process, we must trust God's process in our lives, knowing God is shaping us for something more beautiful and eternal.

### John 21:1-19

My preparation usually starts with reading through the text, sometimes in a couple of different versions. At this stage, I am looking for words or phrases which either jump out at me, or spark some interest in finding out more about the passage from commentaries or other books of reference. I am also interested in how I am reacting to the passage presented because sometimes, to examine why I am not feeling quite so enthusiastic is worth investigating and wrestling with.

In putting together this week's worship material however, it was interesting to reflect on the passages in a group, rather than in isolation. We all have such different jumping off

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points. Our different contexts and the kinds of path we have trodden to reach where we are today, influenced our approach to scripture and how we might deliver a message that speaks to us. It proved a very rich way of developing a theme. Maybe, within your own context, you could develop this way of working.

My choice of the passage from John to reflect on, was instantaneous. Maybe, because the gospel epilogue can be seen as a bit of an ambiguity (and I am always drawn to the openness of ambiguity), but it is still full of vivid imagery and holds a complex message of restoration, leadership and discipleship.

For this passage, and context, I am drawn to look at the passage as a whole, rather than being drawn to specific verses. The whole feels like three scenes in a play, each of which have specific messages, but together, give the powerful message of what love, service and mission mean in the post resurrection world of John's gospel.

Scene 1: The gift of extravagant grace – especially if we look perhaps in the unexpected places and the discovery of treasure.

Scene 2: The sharing of what we have with each other through the barbecue on the beach.

Scene 3: Not keeping the powerful message to ourselves. Who me? The sending out to feed others.

## Sermon ideas

#### For Acts 9:1-20

We see Saul gain new and refreshed sight, being able to see the world from a different perspective, looking at a new path that God might be calling and showing. You could prepare a sermon for Vocations Sunday that talks about how God might be calling people to turn their sights and to look towards a new path, revealing a refreshed vision where God might be leading them.

We also witness Saul having a conversation with God, trying to 'flesh out' what is going on and asking whose voice is speaking. For Vocations Sunday you could talk about how God can speak to us in unique ways, and how we have an opportunity to 'tune into God' and to encounter God through conversation and other people's stories, which can provide clarity and reassurance.

### For Psalm 30

In the context of Vocation Sunday, you could consider preparing a sermon about:

- rediscovering a sense of calling which may have felt lost or dead.
- the need for encouraging and supporting others' calling within the Church community.
- the dance of discernment, the joy that comes in the morning, as we live out what we feel called to.

#### For Revelation 5:11-14

The caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly is a stunning picture of the spiritual transformation we experience through Jesus Christ. Just as the butterfly emerges from its cocoon with wings to fly, we are transformed by the Lamb who was slain. We are given wings to soar, to rise above our struggles, to reflect His beauty, and to share His light with the world.

In Revelation 5:11-14, all creation praises the Lamb who made this transformation possible. And as we are transformed, we, too are invited to join this cosmic chorus —to live lives of worship, purpose, and freedom, bringing glory to the Creator.

Let us remember that, like the butterfly, our transformation in Christ has a purpose—to bring beauty, freedom, and light into the world, reflecting the magnificence of the Lamb, who is worthy of all honour, power and praise.

See Revelation 5:11-14 exegesis (above) for full version.

### For John 21:1-19

If you chose this passage for a sermon (and there is so much possibility here you might like to think of a three-sermon series!), there could be the possibility of a collaborative presentation, with three voices reflecting on the different scenes.

Alternatively, rather than a straight sermon, the passage could be used as a basis for discussions around tables. The amazing catch of fish could be a jumping-off point for a congregational conversation about doing things differently. What is it, in the life of the Church, that holds us back from doing something radically different?

The meal prepared from the fish that have been caught results in a kind of radical hospitality that we are always challenged with – sharing together the abundance that God has given to us in Jesus. Maybe the next questions in a conversation could be, "What do we have, what are we called to share, and how does it show God's face to others?" Then, maybe a final question could be, "Who and how are we called to lead in this new missional journey?" On a Sunday when we are thinking about 'calling', the questions put to Peter can say to us that wherever we have been and whatever we have done in the past, we are all called now by Jesus, according to our gifts. Whether that is to teach, to preach, to organise, to pray, whatever our calling, Jesus challenges each one of us.

## **Prayers**

#### An opening prayer

Loving God, Thank You for bringing us together today. We've come from different places, carrying different things joys, worries, hopes, and questions. But right now, we pause and open ourselves to You.

As we worship, remind us why we're here to lift up the name of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, the One who gave everything so we could be made new. You are worthy, Lord—worthy of our praise, worthy of our trust, and worthy of our lives.

So, transform us today.

Renew our minds so we see the world through Your eyes. Soften our hearts where they've grown hard and fill them with Your love. Shape our lives so that everything we do points back to Your grace and goodness.

As we sing, pray, and hear Your Word, move among us. Challenge us, comfort us, and change us. Make us more like Jesus in how we love, how we serve, and how we live each day.

Worthy is the Lamb our Saviour, our King, our hope.

Amen

## Call to Worship/Opening Prayer (Based on Psalm 30)

Lead: Sing praises to God. All: **And give thanks to God's name.** Lead: God's anger is for a moment. All: **But God's love is for a lifetime.** Lead: There may be pain in the night. All: **But joy comes in the morning.** Lead: The Lord has taken my grieving heart. All: **And caused me to dance again.** Lead: The Lord has taken my funeral clothes. All: **And clothed me with joy.** Lead: The dust of death remains silent. All: **But my living soul shouts aloud.** 

#### **Confession / Repentance**

Loving God, You know all there is to know about us, Our deepest thoughts, desires, and passions are clear to You. You know when we are being true to that which You have called us and when we act to please others.

We come to You today with the confidence that we can trust You. We can trust You with our dreams, whether they are still a seed, or whether they fill our every waking thought. We can trust You with our insecurities, our self-doubt, and uncertainty about what might happen if we choose to step out in following You. We bring to You our whole lives.

Forgive us for when we have chosen the praise of others, instead of listening to the still small voice calling us to more.

When we have strayed from Your path, buried the talents You have given us, or dismissed the desires You have placed in our hearts, forgive us.

Expand our horizons and help us to see our lives as You do. Before we were formed in the womb, You knew us and called us. Help us to discern what it is that You have called us to.

Forgive us when we fail to encourage others.

Fill our mouths with words which build up and strengthen others. Let our community be one which inspires others to adventure with You, to dance with You, as we discover together the particular work that You have given our hands to do.

Lord, guide us. Be with us. Help us to walk in Your way. Amen.

## A Prayer of calling

Loving God, we rejoice that You are not distant, but are engaged daily in the living of our lives. We marvel that You would choose to build Your Kingdom through ordinary folks like us! We thank You, too that You have a plan and purpose for our lives – that none of us need be left spectating, when You have called us to participate in all that You're doing.

Today, we pray for those who are exploring calling, asking that You would lead them in their thinking and in their feeling and that You would aid them in their discerning.

We thank You for those who are now in training for the ministries of the Church, asking that You would be building them up in faith and equipping them effectively for the challenges that will lie ahead.

We thank You for our probationers,

asking that You would journey with them through this final part of their training and participation,

putting that spark of excitement in them as they begin to envisage what You have in store for them.

We also pray for those of our assistant ministers who are trained and 'good to go', longing now for the right door to open for them.

Faithful God, You call, You equip, You send out. For all that You have done, are doing and will do, we give You thanks.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Blessing/Closing Prayer (Based on Psalm 30)

As we go from this place,

May the God whose love lasts a lifetime, be with you.

May the resurrection power of Christ, turn your mourning to dancing.

May the Spirit who breathed life into dust, cause you to sing a new song.

The blessing of God, our faithful deliverer, be yours this day and until we meet again. Amen.

## Closing Prayer/Blessing (encompassing all scripture passages)

As we leave this place, let us trust in God's faithfulness,

even at times when we don't know where the journey may lead us.

Let us uphold God's mighty power – a power that can lead and provide a new direction. Let us have hearts to listen, feet that are willing to walk and hands that are ready to serve. Let us open our eyes to see the path that God can lead us – a path where we are called by name and are led to transformation.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen. (**Or)** 

And now may the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you, now and always. Amen.

## **Musical suggestions**

*God Welcomes All* (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.



The full music and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all

Our <u>online music resource</u> is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the <u>Songs for</u> <u>Sunday blog</u> from Trinity College Glasgow.

- GWA 34 "Sun, soil and seeds" a song considering growth in the Kingdom of God and a reminder that growth is a process, not an instant event.
- GWA 82 "Here and now we're bound together" relates well with the general theme of calling and sending.
- CH4 237 "Look forward in faith" entreats us to walk God's way through life
- CH4 251 "I, the Lord of sea and sky" demonstrating a longing for people to turn back to God.
- CH4 352 "O for a thousand tongues" a Wesley classic, ideal for any praise.
- CH4 502 "Take my life, Lord let it be" a song of dedicating everything we possess to God.
- MP 848 "Lord, you have my heart" (<u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j Ka3r-4EDk</u>)
- MP 32 "An Army of Ordinary People" (<u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pir4zISWiko</u>)
- "Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!" by Fanny Crosby, is in numerous hymnals, such as *Hymns Old and New* and the *Baptist Hymnal 2008*

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- "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" adapted by Don Wyrtzen (*copyright Singspiration Music 1973*).
- "New Every Morning" by The Porter's Gate A song celebrating the newness of life available to us each day. <u>New Every Morning</u>
- A suggested playlist of songs throughout the Easter season can be found on the Church of Scotland website. <u>https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/easter</u>

## **Reflecting on our worship practice**

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and nonverbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

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The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship? Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/ intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God? What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?
  Did it function well as a whole?
  How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship? What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
  Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/ community?
  How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
  How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

## **Useful links**

God Welcomes All can be ordered from Hymns Ancient & Modern

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship <u>here</u>

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online here

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