



Sunday Feb 21st, 2021
First Sunday in Lent
The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle



Here we are, at the beginning of Lent. Five Sundays and forty days of journeying towards Holy Week. Here we are, invited to walk into the wilderness with Jesus.

Here we are, together in the Spirit, apart or

gathered.

Light the candle, let it shine, let it dance.
 The light of Christ.

Call to worship

Genesis 9:16 & 17: When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

We come here as children of the covenant,
 God of the rainbow, God of all the earth.
 Gather us in from our wandering ways.
 Gather us in from our doubtful days.
 Gather us into your presence and hold us,
 in the grace of your embrace.

Acknowledging



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
 Christian Congress*

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land on which we live and the waters surrounding us. We honor and respect their elders past, present and emerging and commit ourselves to truth-telling, and working for justice as we walk together.

Singing - She sits like a bird, TiS 418

She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters,
 Hovering on the chaos of the world's first day;
 She sighs and she sings, mothering creation,
 Waiting to give birth to all the Word will say.

She wings over earth, resting where she wishes,
 Lighting close at hand or soaring through the
 skies;
 She nests in the womb, welcoming each wonder,
 Nourishing potential hidden to our eyes.

She dances in fire, startling her spectators,
 Waking tongues of ecstasy where dumbness
 reigned;
 She weans and inspires all whose hearts are
 open,
 Nor can she be captured, silenced or restrained.

For she is the Spirit, one with God in essence,
 Gifted by the Saviour in eternal love;
 She is the key opening the scriptures,
 Enemy of apathy and heavenly dove.

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Prayer

Based on Psalm 25:1-10

To you, O God, I lift up my soul.
 In you, O God, I trust.

**We look to you, sure of your promise,
 held in the rainbow, after the rain.**

Make me to know your ways,
 and teach me your paths.
 Lead me in your truth,
**We can only step out into the wilderness
 if you go before us, teach us
 and show us your ways.**

Be mindful of your mercy,
 and of your steadfast love,
 for they have been from of old,

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remember me, for your goodness' sake,

**Forgive us for the times we have gone astray
as we are always growing up, into you.
Keep us in your sight, constantly.**

Good and upright is our God;
instructing us in the way.

**You lead the humble in what is right,
and teach the humble your way.**

All the paths of God
are steadfast love and faithfulness,
**for those who keep God's covenant
and live in God's way. May it be so, Amen.**

Listening

Read Genesis 9:8-17

Mark 1:9-15

For these words of faith, and for Jesus, the Word,
thanks be to God, Amen.

Reflecting - Rev. Arnie Wierenga

I wonder what you think of the wilderness.

I grew up in Tasmania, and the South West wilderness embraces untamed rivers, rugged mountains, impenetrable forest, and a longing for the lost Tasmanian tiger.

Desert, wilderness, and remote places are often described as God-forsaken. Yet after Jesus is baptised, the Spirit urges him there. In my mind, baptism seems an ideal start to ministry, even more considering it comes with words of blessing from heaven. But God's ways call us along the road less travelled.

Today marks the first Sunday of Lent, the time where church folk begin a journey, following Jesus to the cross of Easter. Can we follow him to the wilderness? Aside from a few hardy (or foolhardy) and rugged individuals or religious hermits, mostly we avoid the wilds. Perhaps the hardest wilderness is the one Jesus embraces - 40 days in the company of the tempter, Satan.

I'm not all that fanatical about the wilderness and I don't see myself as particularly hardy, but I do like to go 'off grid' or take the van to places of relative isolation where we can still be comfortable. This semi-wilderness offers a chance to switch off phones and computers, to rise with the sun and sleep as it sets (we get lots of sleep in the winter!) and generally be away from all that might otherwise occupy us.

Although I cannot speak especially of Jesus' experience, it seems this is what helps him ready for ministry and ultimately the cross. In the wilderness, temptation can go either way – it can undo us or save us. We find in Matthew and Luke's accounts of this time that Jesus is tempted to take easy options – food, power and shelter. Satan promises things too good to be true, for the seemingly small price of Jesus' soul!

And through it all, Jesus emerges with a clarity of vision and purpose that then leads him to start ministry in Galilee. After forty days, Jesus emerges from the wild beasts, angels and temptation and proclaims, 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.'

To the ancients, forty days is important. The number links to the great Exodus under the leadership of Moses. It comes as a reminder of forty days and nights of rain as we remember the story of Noah. More importantly, God tells Noah that the rainbow is a reminder of God's commitment and ongoing care for every living creature. It reminds God of us, and of course it reminds us of God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, forty (days, weeks, years) signals a long time, the right amount of time, God's time.

So, Jesus emerges from the wilderness in God's time. At the right time he begins ministry in Galilee. His first words are a call to repent and believe. It is a reminder to return to God, to return to the covenant, to remember promises whenever we see the rainbow, to remember that while there are many easy paths we could take, if



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we turn towards God, the journey comes with blessing, with love, and will not cost our soul.

Not all of us will benefit from or could live with the wild beasts for forty days. But instead, we are invited to a Lenten journey, the time from now until Easter. This church season invites us to set aside forty days to journey with Jesus, to be reminded of what it means to turn towards God. The ultimate destination is the resurrection of Jesus, but before we get there we need to travel in God's time, for there is much to learn.

And we learn today where to find good news – in turning towards God and believing.

May the rainbow come as a blessing and reminder as we journey with Jesus the Christ. Amen.



Responding:
Prayers for the World & Community

Your children cry to you, O God,
God of the covenant, hear our prayer.

Your children cry to you, O God,
 for those in the wilderness of pain:
 physical, mental, emotional and spiritual,
God of the covenant, hear our prayer.

Your children cry to you, O God,
 for those in the wilderness of isolation,
 through lockdowns and through breakdowns,
God of the covenant, hear our prayer.

Your children cry to you, O God,
 for those in the wilderness of addiction;
 the ones consumed and their loved ones,
God of the covenant, hear our prayer.

Your children cry to you, O God,
 for those in the wilderness of hunger
 hungry for food, for meaning, for care,

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God of the covenant, hear our prayer.

Your children cry to you, O God,
 for those in the wilderness of abuse
 from authority, family, strangers and within
 God of the covenant, **Hear our prayer.**

Your children cry to you, O God,
 hear these cries and come close
 with the power of your healing hand,
 with the lifegiving breath of the Spirit,
 with us, through us, or despite us.
 God of the covenant, **Hear our prayer.**

As we pray together:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial
 and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
 are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Passing the peace

May the Peace of God dwell with you:
and also with you.

Offering

Bless the gifts we bring, and through the church in this place, use them to bring hope and healing to those who are struggling, to celebrate with the joyful and to offer the invitation of hospitality in Christ to the wider community. Amen.

Notices

Like leaven in the loaf - our 2021 Synod of VicTas meeting is online this week from Friday 26th to Sunday 28th. The entire meeting, excluding any



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member-only sessions, will be broadcast live for members of the wider church. The Synod Worship will be streamed via the same link at 7.30pm on February 26. To find the link go to <https://victas.uca.org.au/about-us/synod-meeting/> or check the Presbytery website.

From UnitingWorld - an invitation for Lent - <https://donate.unitingworld.org.au/event/lent-event> For the next forty days, between 17th Feb and March 2021, we invite you to celebrate the season of Lent by reflecting on and rededicating yourself to Christ's compassion and justice. Together, **we've been part of helping create a world with more hope and less suffering than at any time in history.** But with COVID-19 threatening so many, now is the time for us to continue to dig deep for our brothers and sisters.

Join other Christians as we learn together about how to be Good Global Neighbours through our Bible Study series. Put what you're learning into action by pledging to live simply, and giving up something in solidarity with those who live with less (Action Ideas). Donate to the work, and know that every dollar is part of **God's mission in the world**, ending poverty and building hope.

Singing - Christ be my leader TIS 624

Christ be my leader by night as by day;
safe through the darkness for he is the way.
Gladly I follow, my future his care,
darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.

Christ be my teacher in age as in youth,
drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.
Grant me to trust him,
though shifting as sand,
doubt cannot daunt me; in Jesus I stand.

Christ be my Savior in calm as in strife;
death cannot hold me, for he is the life.
Nor darkness nor doubting
nor sin and its stain
can touch my salvation: with Jesus I reign.

Thomas Dudley Smith 1926- Scottish Traditional Melody
Used with permission CCLI 241 739

Blessing

May the love of Christ enfold you,
wherever he may lead you.
May he guide you through the wilderness,
protect you in the storm.
May he bring you home, rejoicing
at the wonders he has shown you.
May he bring you home rejoicing,
with a welcome at the door.

Go in peace, to love and serve God,
In the name of Christ, Amen.

Presbytery of Gippsland
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