



Sunday Feb 28th, 2021
Second Sunday in Lent
The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

Here we are on our Lenten journey.

We walk by faith towards the promises of tomorrow, with the resurrected Jesus, leading us, walking beside us, calling us on. We gather in the presence of God, with joy and laughter.



As the candle is lit,
 we acknowledge
 that Christ is the light of the world,
 our hope and our salvation.

Call to worship - Based on Psalm 22:

In this congregation,
 we come to praise our God.
 The poor will eat and be satisfied.
 Those who seek the Lord
 will also offer their praise,
 and their hearts will live forever.
 All the ends of the earth,
 will remember and turn to God.
 All the families of the nations will worship.
 So let us worship God.

Acknowledging



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
 Christian Congress*

As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians on the lands where we live. We pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging and offer that respect also to First Peoples using this resource or hearing these words. We commit ourselves to walking together in covenant, First and Second Peoples, united for justice and peace.

Listening

Read: Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16

Singing - To Abraham and Sarah

can be sung to THORNBURY 76 76 D TIS 456

To Abraham and Sarah
 the call of God was clear:
 "Go forth, and I will show you
 a country rich and fair.
 You need not fear the journey,
 for I have pledged my word
 that you shall be my people
 and I will be your God."

From Abraham and Sarah
 arose a pilgrim race,
 dependent for their journey
 on God's abundant grace;
 and in their heart was written
 by God this saving word,
 "That you shall be my people
 and I will be your God."

We of the generation
 on whom God's hand is laid
 can journey to the future
 secure and unafraid,
 rejoicing in God's goodness
 and trusting in his word,
 "That you shall be my people
 and I will be your God."

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Prayer

Gracious God,
 We come with thankfulness that you call us
 to follow you, to be your disciples, to be your
 people.

But we know that our thoughts and our
 intentions do not always align with yours,
 and often are in opposition to your will and
 desires. We think we know best. For the
 times when we believe our ways are better
 than yours, forgive us. **Forgive us.**



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When we worship you and feel safe and comfortable we delight in you and your words. But we know that when we are in the world, and even with other Christians, we may hold back from saying what needs to be said and doing what needs to be done. For the times when we have not upheld your truth as we know it, forgive us. **Forgive us.**

We want to be people who uphold the law, and do what is right particularly in the life of the church and the community. But for those times when living by the letter of the law, means that we fail to show grace and mercy, forgive us. **Forgive us.**

Sometimes your call upon our life seems preposterous and unbelievable, causing us to smirk and laugh. For the times we think your call seems unattainable and unfathomable, forgive us. **Forgive us.**

Our God, we thank you that you are a God of grace. So we go forward knowing we are forgiven and renewed. **Thanks be to God.**

Singing - In the presence TIS 727

based on Psalm 22 - start slowly and speed up

In the presence of your people,
I will praise your name,
for alone you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
Let us celebrate your goodness,
and your steadfast love,
may your name be exalted
here on earth and in heaven above.

Lai-la-lai-la-lai-lai ...

TIS 727, Brent Chambers 1948-

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Listening

Read: Romans 4:13-25 & Mark 8:31-38

For these words of faith

& for Jesus the Word: **Thanks be to God.**

Reflecting - Rev. Jennie Gordon

Mind the gap – keep the covenant.

Today, Sunday Feb 28th, in the Synod meeting, working groups will be engaging with Covenanting. In this session we'll be looking at a new Covenanting Guide as a resource for our congregations, schools and agencies to continue the journey of walking together as First and Second peoples, in our church and in our lives. We're being asked to keep the Covenant, the agreement between the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Uniting Church in Australia, at the heart of who we are as church and as followers of Jesus. We're being asked to continue in the way of covenanting, seeking to bridge the many gaps between us, reaching for each other as the Spirit binds us together, First and Second peoples.

The theme of covenant, of God reaching out towards us, is held in our readings with a story from the ancient texts and a story from the life of Jesus. A covenant connects two or more parties; it bridges a gap, brings us into relationship and holds us there.

In the reading from Genesis, we hear about the covenant between God and Abram, going backwards and forwards through the generations and having such an impact that it necessitated a radical change: Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah, adding a breath sound to their own names that exhales the unutterable name of God. God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah was beyond their wildest imaginings, a bridge between the almighty and the ordinary, offered and held because of their faith.

It goes without saying that there's always a gap between us and God. Our yearning, our praying, our learning, our staying with the church even when it seems a little crazy, is about us reaching for God. At the same time God reaches for us, bridging the gap, through the ancient covenants and then the living covenant, the incarnation:

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God-emmanuel, Word made flesh, Jesus the Christ.

In Mark's gospel there's no doubt that Peter lives in this gap, and here he speaks into the space between who we think Jesus ought to be and who he is. Peter has just proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah, (brilliant!). Jesus goes on to explain what that means. Mind the gap now, it's huge! Jesus' teaching about suffering and death is such a long way from Peter's expectation of what lies ahead for Jesus, and for his followers, that he pulls Jesus away and rebukes him, (not so brilliant!). Then Jesus rebukes Peter, telling him to 'get the devil out of his way', or words to that effect.

Jesus goes on to tell all those who are listening; 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'. For the disciples and the hearers of this gospel, martyrdom was not a metaphor, it was a reality. There have been plenty of attempts to explain, contextualise and domesticate Jesus' words, 'take up your cross.' We're inheritors of a well-worn 'Christian' ideal that this is about submissiveness being a pious virtue. It seeps into our everyday in so many ways, and it goes along the lines that those who suffer in silence and willingly shoulder the burden that they have been made to carry will be rewarded. It's been used to justify some horrendous and abusive behaviour and I don't believe that's what Jesus meant at all. There's such a gap between the reality of death row for Jesus and his followers, and what it might mean for us to 'take up the cross' in a culture that simultaneously tolerates, ridicules, dismisses and ignores us as disciples of Jesus. What does it mean for us to 'take up the cross'? Maybe it's about letting go of our constant motivation for individualistic self-preservation and protection of what we think is rightfully ours. Maybe it's about being brave enough to speak truth to power and then to shoulder the consequences. Maybe it's about seeing the cross as a sign of God's costly covenant of love, reaching for us across the gap. What do you think?

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

Our Lord and our God,

As Abraham's call for Israel was that it would be a blessing, we pray that the church will be a blessing to the lives it touches in word and deed, with the good news of God's love.

We uphold our local congregations, for the churches of other denominations in our town and region and for the activities they do together, and for clergy that meet for fellowship and encouragement.

We are mindful of the upcoming World Day of Prayer, that they will be uplifting times of inspiration and coming together. We bring before you the focus nation of Vanuatu with all of its struggles and joys.

We come in prayer for the Uniting Church, particularly with the virtual Synod meeting this weekend. We ask that good and wise decisions will be made, knowing that you are a God of wisdom.

We acknowledge that Jesus is the Head of the Church and desire your guidance in all things.

And we pray for the Moderator-elect and those who were not elected. May your peace and presence be with them.

Let us now have a time of silence to bring before God those people and situations on our heart and mind...

For the prayers we pray out loud, those we pray quietly and those that are like groanings within us, we offer them in the name of Christ, who taught us to pray saying:



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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

Loving God, we give thanks for the ways we have been blessed financially, and freely we give something of that back to you. So we pray that you will use our money, our time and our talents for your purposes and to be a blessing to others. Amen.

Notices

Today, Sunday Feb 28th, is the final day of the meeting of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. It's been happening since Friday, online. You can view most sessions and the opening worship online following a link that will be available on Friday Feb 26th. <https://victas.uca.org.au/about-us/synod-meeting/>

Please keep this meeting in your prayers, and also those who are leading us through these times of challenge and struggle. May the Spirit be the leaven in the loaf, enlivening us, making us rise with grace and peace, to share the life we've been given with those around us.

Singing - Community of Christ, TIS 473

Community of Christ,
 who make the cross your own,
 live out your creed
 and risk your life for God alone:
 the God who wears your face,
 to whom all worlds belong,

whose children are of every race
 and every song.

Community of Christ,
 look past the Church's door
 and see the refugee, the hungry
 and the poor.
 Take hands with the oppressed,
 the jobless in your street,
 take towel and water,
 that you wash your neighbour's feet.

Community of Christ,
 through whom the word must sound -
 cry out for justice and for peace
 the whole world round:
 disarm the powers that war
 and all that can destroy, turn bombs to
 bread, and tears of anguish into joy.

When menace melts away,
 so shall God's will be done,
 the climate of the world be peace
 and Christ its Sun;
 our currency be love and kindness our law,
 our food and faith be shared as one
 for evermore.

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Blessing

As you are blessed,
 go forward to be a blessing to others.
 Knowing that the resurrected Christ
 goes with you.
 So go with peace, hope, joy and love,
in the name of Christ Amen.

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