



Sunday March 14th, 2021
Fourth Sunday in Lent
The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

Our journey of Lent continues and here we are on the Fourth Sunday.

Take a moment to bring to mind one image, thought, action or idea that has helped you to feel connected to the life and love of God recently. Light the candle and give thanks.



Call to worship (According to psalm 107)

In praise of God's goodness, "Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good; his love is eternal."

Repeat these words in praise to the Lord, all you whom he has saved. He has rescued you from your enemies.

And has brought you back from foreign countries, from east and west, from north and south.

Some wandered in the trackless desert and could not find their way to a city to live in.

They were hungry and thirsty and had given up all hope.

Then in their trouble they called to the Lord, and he saved them from their distress. Amen.

Acknowledging

As we gather we acknowledge the First Peoples, traditional custodians of this land and these waters. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and future, and commit ourselves to journeying together, First and Second peoples, building relationships of mutual respect and understanding.



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

Singing: TiS 569

Guide me, O thou great redeemer

Words: William Williams 1717-91 alt. Music: John Hughes 1873-1932 TiS 569 Used with permission CCLI 206 729

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
 pilgrim through this barren land;
 I am weak, but thou art mighty;
 hold me with thy powerful hand:
 bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
 feed me now and evermore,
 feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain
 whence the living waters flow:
 let the fiery, cloudy pillar
 lead me all my journey through:
 strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
 be thou still my strength and shield
 be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
 bid my anxious fears subside;
 death of death and hell's destruction,
 land me safe on Canaan's side:
 songs of praises, songs of praises,
 I will ever sing to thee,
 I will ever sing to thee.



Prayer

In the season of Lent we remember Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. We follow him. We follow with our minds the stories of scripture; we follow with our hearts the passion of Christ and the passion of our brothers and sisters; we follow with hands and feet through recommitment to justice and reconciliation; we follow with the wings of the spirit in prayer and meditation. May our minds be open; may our hands be strong; may our hearts be gentle; may our spirits sing. May this worship so transform us that in the week to come we will, indeed share with others our Jerusalem journeys and follow Jesus in the way of life. **Amen.**

Confession prayer:

Lord and Father, we worship you as the God who has made us. Life is your gift, and in you we live and move and exist. You know all our needs, and our desires, you meet them generously. But sometimes we are never satisfied with what we



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have, but must always envy others' success. We cannot allow other people to be different from us: either we want to be like them or we try to make them conform to ourselves, Lord forgive us. We know that you gave people through Jesus the assurance that they were reconciled to you, and in this way they became reconciled to life. You have renewed that assurance to generation after generation since. Please reconcile us as well. Come to us in your mercy and awaken our faith.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Word of assurance: Jesus Christ came into the world to rescue and heal us, if we truly want these things, we can have them.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Listening

Read: Numbers 21: 4-9

and John 3:14-21

For these words of faith

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

Reflecting - Rev. Jennie Gordon

Driving along the South Gippsland Highway, you may have seen the jersey caramel cow on a pole at the gate of the Caldermeade Farm. It looks slightly strange and a bit out of context floating high in the sky above the paddocks. I guess it is good marketing because it makes you look up and wonder...

In this week's readings we have a snake on a pole and a part of the gospel that is out of context, (missing the beginning of the story), and we're invited to look up, and wonder, and live.

The underlying paradox in the story from Numbers, (the final episode of the people's grumbles and Moses's response), is held in the symbol of the snake. The very thing that causes death also brings healing. There's an obvious, underlying, parallel paradox in the gospel story; the cross, the very instrument of torture and death, also leads to life.

So as the snake is lifted up, so too the Son of Man is lifted.

The people of Israel have had enough of manna. The bread from heaven was a life-saver when they first encountered it, gobbled with glee, but it's grown weary on the palate and they've got some grumbles with Moses, and with God. They come with a simple question; 'Why?'. 'Why have you brought us here?'

I don't know what to do with God's action of killing some of them off with poisonous snakes because I don't inhabit that worldview of a wrathful and vengeful God but this part of the story is intrinsic to the narrative as it leads us into the paradox. When they beg for mercy, it is given to them, in the form of a homeopathic healing. That which makes them ill, can cure them, if only they look, look up and live. Questions, dialogue, prayer and pleading and an invitation to life if only they can shift their gaze from the ground of grumbling to the heavens for rescue and release.

The reading from the gospel of John comes halfway through the story. We're reading an answer without the questions. Going back to the start of the story, we have a learned man named Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night, in the darkness, for enlightenment, acknowledging that Jesus is a teacher from God. In the conversation he comes up with questions, 'How can this be? How can this happen?'

Today's reading is part of the answer, although some scholars believe it may be the voice of the narrator of the gospel, and not intended to be from Jesus. Either way, it's in these words that we find the lectionary link, "and just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up, that everyone having faith in him might have the life of the Age. For God so loved the cosmos ..." (*David Bentley Hart's translation of the New testament*).

Jesus will be lifted up on the cross, the cruel and lethal punishment that lined the Roman occupied

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roads as a warning to troublemakers. Yet, through this lifting up, Jesus will break the bounds of death and bring us life. Again, I don't hold a worldview of a wrathful and vengeful God who needed someone to take the punishment and so sent the Son to certain death to save us all. I live in a cosmos that God loves so much, that God was outrageously willing to come among us, as our flesh, and endure all the ensuing pleasure and pain that we visit on each other. This God loves us so much that the Son was sent, not to condemn us, but to lead us to life. This is eternal life; life that breaks the bounds of death and not just the final episode of death, but every little death along the way. This God loves us so much that even a barbaric instrument of torture was transformed into a symbol of life, an invitation to look up and live.

So may you look up, and see the cross in the context of God's love for the cosmos. May you look up, and inhabit a world where you are free to wonder and to find your questions and seek the answers boldly. May you look up, and live, fully live, now and always, Amen.

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

You may choose to stop at some places in this prayer and sing the Taize Community refrain from TIS 741:

*Oh Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer,
 when I call, answer me,*

*O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer.
 Come and listen to me.*

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Loving God, who brought this world and all that is into being. We gather here to worship you and to celebrate the fourth Sunday of Lent. You have come among us with hope and love and mercy. We praise you, loving saviour, that you have shown us love and you have died for our sin. We believe nothing will ever separate us from this love. You reach out to us, declaring that we are your own dear children to follow you in this

season. Glorious God, your mercies are without end, as you look upon all your children across the reaches of time and space. You have made us for yourself and we long to know your healing and redeeming power making us and all things new. We rejoice in you and in the power of love which you have brought us in healing, peace and hope to all of us.

God of eternity, Creator of all, we adore you and we pray especially for our world, but also for ourselves, for your giving life for all creatures, and you provide all things necessary to sustain life. You come gently to us breathing into us your gifts of grace. You remind us always that we belong to you as you are a great almighty Father and Mother. Thank you for this Lent season as you provide it for us as the season of repentance. You affirm your goodness, and invite us to be sharers in your journey and we experienced this especially at the time of pandemic Covid-19.

Please help us to overcome all these things in Jesus name. Amen.

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.



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Offering

Bless these gifts that we bring, God of outrageous and abundant love. Help us to use these offerings, and to offer our lives, to continue the mission of Jesus; to bring the fullness of life to people we encounter. Amen.

Notices

How are you going in this season of Lent? Maybe, in some ways, we've been in Lent since March 2020 when the virus caused the first of the lockdowns? How has it impacted you? What are you looking forward to in the celebration of Easter this year? What are your hopes for the world as we slowly emerge from the depths of the pandemic? Email our editor and share your thoughts, and we'll include them in coming weeks.

Singing -

Morning glory, starlit sky TiS 174

Can also be sung to the well known tune VIENNA - TiS 440
 Words: William Vanstone 1923- Music: Alan Wilson 1947-
 Used with permission CCLI 206 729

Morning glory, starlit sky,
 soaring music, scholar's truth,
 flight of swallows, autumn leaves,
 memory's treasure, grace of youth:

open are the gifts of God,
 gifts of love to mind and sense;
 hidden is love's agony,
 love's endeavour, love's expense.

Love that gives, gives ever more,
 gives with zeal, with eager hands,
 spares not, keeps not, all outpours,
 ventures all, it all expands.

Drained is love in making full,
 bound in setting others free,
 poor in making many rich,
 weak in giving power to be.

Therefore he who shows us God
 helpless hangs upon a tree;
 and the nails and crown of thorns
 tell of what God's love must be.

Here is God, no monarch he,
 throned in easy state to reign,
 here is God, whose arms of love,
 aching, spent, the world sustain.

Blessing

Go knowing that you are loved,
 so much,
 by a God who comes amongst us
 offering life.

May you look up,
 and see the presence of the Spirit around you,
 the same Spirit that hovered over the waters,
 in the beginning,
 still breathing life into the cosmos.

May you look up, and live in a way
 that encourages others to look up as well,
 look up and live,
 in Jesus' name.
 Amen.

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