



Sunday March 21st, 2021
Fifth Sunday in Lent
The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

Psalm 51:10-12 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.



As we light the candle
 we wonder
 at the gift
 of being restored
 with joy.

Call to worship

John 12:21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

We come to you, God of all,
 longing to see Jesus,
 Gather us in from our scattered lives,
 with our fragmented faith
 and our faltering steps.
 Gather us in, nourish us with your Word
 and bless us in this time together.

Let your Spirit show us the way
 to lose our life in you
 so that we can keep growing
 into the joy of your eternal life
 in the world where we are,
 for the world where we are. Amen.

Acknowledging



As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. We do this every time we meet because it recognises the people whose land we occupy and it calls us again into the responsibilities of the covenant relationship between First and Second Peoples in the Uniting Church.

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Singing: Jesus calls us here TiS 477

Jesus calls us here to meet him
 as, through word and song and prayer,
 we affirm God's promised presence
 where God's people live and care.
 Praise the God who keeps the promise;
 praise the Son who calls us friends;
 praise the Spirit who, among us,
 to our hopes and fears attends

Jesus calls us to confess him,
 Word of Life and Lord of All,
 sharer of our flesh and frailness
 saving all who fail or fall.
 Tell his holy, human story;
 tell his tales that all may hear;
 tell the world that Christ in glory
 came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other:
 found in him are no divides.
 Race and class and sex and language
 such are barriers he derides.
 Join the hand of friend and stranger;
 join the hands of age and youth;
 join the faithful and the doubter
 in their common search for truth.

John Bell & Graham Maule, alt. Used with permission CCLI 206 729



Prayer

God of the covenant,
for the blessing of life and the wonder of love
we give you thanks,
 for the mystery of the microbe
 and the endless unfolding of the heavens
 we give you thanks,
for the gentle acts of kindness
and the gift of friends and family
we give you thanks,

*You might want to add some more things
 that pour out of your grateful heart.*

Have mercy on us, O God,
 because we long to be your people:



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full of kindness,
 doing justice and walking humbly,
 but so often we get it wrong:

Prayer refrain: TiS 712

Digby Hannah 1949- Used with permission. CCLI 206 729

*Create in us a clean heart, O God.
 Renew within us a right spirit.
 Cast us not away from your presence, O Lord,
 and take not your Holy Spirit from us.
 Restore us to fullness of joy,
 the joy that springs from your salvation.
 Lighten our minds, shelter our lives
 with your Spirit free.*

Forgive each of us
 for the times we have turned away
 for the ways we misuse power
 for the words we speak that cause harm.
 (prayer refrain)

Forgive our congregation, our nation, our world,
 for the times we turn away
 for the ways we misuse power
 for the words we speak that cause harm.
 (prayer refrain)

In the silence, create in us a clean heart,
 O God.
 (time of silence)

*In a reading from Jeremiah we hear these words:
 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to
 each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all
 know me, from the least of them to the greatest,
 says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and
 remember their sin no more.*

Sisters and brothers in Christ, know this:
 we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God, Amen.

Listening

Read: Jeremiah 31:31-34
 John 12:20-33

For these words of faith
 and for Jesus the Word: **Thanks be to God.**

Reflecting - Rev. Paul Bauer

I have always related strongly to Jeremiah. Like Jeremiah, I responded to a call to ministry at a young age, but I was older than Jeremiah. Rather than the word 'boy', 'youth' is more accurate for the age of Jeremiah's calling.

Additionally, Jeremiah has always impressed me that he continued on as a prophet amidst all the ups and downs, and times when he was reluctant to do it.

The world that Jeremiah spoke into was one where Israel was in turmoil. They had been conquered by the Assyrians, and then there was the fall of Jerusalem in 587BC by the Babylonians, so the Israelites were scattered from Jerusalem to Babylon.

They were destroyed and in exile. Their moral and social life was in chaos. They had turned from Yahweh, and continually went in search of other gods.

So Jeremiah was a prophet in a setting which wasn't conducive to being heard and embraced. But here was Jeremiah on the scene around 600 years before Christ, and his job was to preach to the people of Israel in order for them to return to the true and living God.

The crux of Israel's message is that if they didn't return to God they would continue to face destruction and exile, but if they did return God would be willing to forgive, embrace them afresh and restore their pride as a nation.

So here in Jeremiah 31 there is a movement from preaching judgment to consolation, hope for the future. God wants the Israelites to have a fresh start, a new covenant, one written on their hearts.

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To affirm again, "I will be their God, and they will be my people."

It reminds of the wonderful Jewish mantra, of the two most important things to remember: 1. There is only one God, and 2. You are not it.

So here God wants the people to change in two ways. Firstly, to worship God alone (not other gods, like fertility gods) and to return to a love of neighbour, especially those struggling and on the margins, the orphan and the widow.

Israel was always at its best when it carried a deep love of God and love for others, especially those in deepest need. I am sure we are the same. I am always heartened by the incredible and amazing work of Uniting, being there for the most vulnerable. Their work gives us great pride in our denomination.

In John 12 it says, 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies'. A theme that crosses both the readings from Jeremiah and John is that of falling and dying. Often, if there is to be positive change, one has to fall, something has to die away, something given up.

Robert Noblett, puts forward this practical example. "We have all been in groups where one person tends to do all the talking; it's as though that person has no ears and only a mouth. As we like to put it, it's hard to get a word in edgeways...Interestingly, when the preacher in Ecclesiastes is going through his litany of opposites and how each has intrinsic value, he mentions silence before speech. Everything in its season, he says, "A time to keep silence, and a time to speak ..." (3:7a).

However, maybe for others, it might be the opposite, to put aside the natural desire to stay silent and to speak up.

So may we continue to be encouraged this Lenten season on our journey of self-examination and reflection, to what God is highlighting in our lives

and asking of us. What needs to fall away and die for change and new growth to come.

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

God of freedom, justice and life,
 knowing that we are your people,
 and you are our God,
 we bring to you the prayers of our hearts:

Bless the earth, the air and the waters,
 bearing the burden of our greed and gain.

Come, Spirit of life, bring renewal.

Bless all creatures, constantly adapting
 to the dynamic and changing environment.

**Come, Spirit of life, give them
 shelter.**

Bless people who are struggling
 with diseases of mind, body and spirit,

Come Spirit of life, ease their pain.

Bless those whose countries are at war,
 with each other, or across borders

Come, Spirit of life, bring peace.

Bless those who have lost what matters
 most, hope, connection, purpose, loved ones

Come, Spirit of life, gather them in.

Bless the young, the aged and the middling,
 making loving lives in a challenging world

Come, Spirit of life, bring wisdom.

Bless us all, longing to be your people,
 as we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us.

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.

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

Thus freely loved, though fully known,
 may I in Christ be free
 to welcome and accept his own
 as Christ accepted me.

Passing the peace

Peace be with you:
and also with you.

w: Brian Arthur Wren m: Leonard Blake
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Offering

We make our offering trusting that what we
 bring, our money, our time, our gifts and
 ourselves, will be useful to you, Spirit of life.
 Infuse these gifts with hope and healing, that
 they may be used in ways that support the work
 of the church and bring your joy-filled life to us
 and to others. God of the covenant, remind us
 again to lose our lives in your service, and to find
 our lives in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Word of mission

Go and be people of the covenant;
restored in our living,
and sure of God's promises.
 Go and be people of the covenant;
bound to each other and to God.
 Go and be people of the covenant;
sharing the joy of our hearts
and living for justice and peace.

Notices

We may be coming to the end of Lent, but it's not
 too late to get involved in the Uniting World Lent
 Event - check it out here:
[https://donate.unitingworld.org.au/event/lent-
 event](https://donate.unitingworld.org.au/event/lent-event)

Blessing

The love of God enfold you,
 the wisdom of Christ enlighten you,
 and the fire of the Spirit inflame you;
 and may the blessing of the Triune God
 rest upon you and abide with you,
 now and evermore. **Amen.**
 - from Uniting in Worship 2 p223

Singing: When Christ was lifted TIS 248

Can be sung to the familiar tune: WILTSHIRE TIS 112

When Christ was lifted from the earth
 his arms outstretched above
 through every culture, every birth,
 to draw an answering love.

Still east and west his love extends
 and always, near or far,
 he calls and claims us as his friends
 and loves us as we are.

Where generation, class or race
 divides us to our shame,
 he sees not labels, but a face,
 a person and a name.

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