



Sunday May 2nd, 2021

The Fig Tree Worship Resource



Gathering & Lighting the Candle

1 John 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*



Light the candle,
breathe deeply and slowly
(and in a COVID-safe way).

Imagine the love of God,
like breath, entering your body,
infusing every cell and then leaving,
flowing out into the world around you.

Call to worship

Lord Jesus, you call your disciples to dwell in you as branches live in a vine. You are the source of nourishment for life, for growth, and for fruitfulness. You keep us online by your word and give us resources to love and serve you in our loving service to others. Holy is the True Vine and the Father who is the gardener. Amen

Acknowledging



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress*

As we gather we acknowledge the First Peoples of this land, the traditional custodians, and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging, committing ourselves again to walking alongside each other in friendship, justice and peace.

Singing - All people that on earth do dwell

TiS 59 (inclusive language version)

All people that on earth do dwell,
sing out your faith with cheerful voice;
delight in God whose praise you tell,
whose presence calls you to rejoice.

Know that there is one God, indeed,
who fashions us without our aid,
who claims us, gives us all we need,
whose tender care will never fade.

Enter the sacred gates with praise;
with joy approach the temple walls.
Extol and bless our God always
as people whom the Spirit calls.

Proclaim again that God is good,
whose mercy is forever sure,
whose truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.

William Kethe; adapt. Thomas H. Troeger
Genevan Psalter, 1551
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Prayer



Great and Good Gardener of Planet Earth, we delight in all your pleasant planting and rejoice in all your provisions for human kind. You planted a people to know and respond to you in love and mercy. You tended them and looked for the harvest of your work. They refused to give you what was owing. Your messengers were denied and rejected. You came amongst us in Emmanuel, and spoke with us and reminded us of our contract with you. We rejected him and his words and deeds and crucified him, cutting down the True Vine: Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus you came to us knowing the terrible cost that would be involved. Your love for the Father and for us took you to the cross, to set us free to grow as children of God. You know our need to be planted firmly where we belong and to draw nourishment from your word. You prune and purify your people, promising always to be the source of their life. On our resistance and hesitance to subject ourselves to your teaching and nurturing: Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Spirit of the Good Gardener, you keep the life of Christ flowing in our hearts, warming us, feeding us, and opening us to growth in love. You let the flow happen, which brings us to our right minds and to loving service of others. Where we feed on other stunting and poisonous food, and deny you as our ultimate resource, becoming less than we should be:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

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Good Gardener of your chosen vineyard, receive our prayers and repentance, assure us of your forgiveness, and help us grow as your loving and free children through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit: God blessed forever. **Amen**

Listening

Read: 1 John 4:7-21

John 15:1-8

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

Reflecting - Rev. Jennie Gordon

This reading from the gospel of John, brings to mind the old hymn, Abide With Me.

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens, Lord with me abide:
when other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

It's a hymn that continues to offer comfort at funerals, written in 1847 by Henry Francis Lyte, just weeks before he died. The tune is by William Henry Monk, written in 1861, not long after the death of his 3-year-old daughter. It's a hymn of solace for the dying, and strength for those left to grieve.

So why have they sung it at every FA Cup final since 1927? What is it about this tune and these words that cause football (soccer) fans to bellow it out at the top of their lungs? This funeral hymn has become a ritual communal cry, an anthemic plea to a God that has generally become an anathema in every other aspect of life for most of the crowd. Why?

We yearn for connection. It makes us feel strong to belong. We are a tribal species and need a sense that we have a part in something bigger in order to survive. Singing together means breathing together and when we do that, we are connected to each other, one body with many voices, singing the same song. In our world today it's so easy for us to be physically isolated from each other. Belting out a song at a sporting event,

before the game or after the final siren, is an act of deep connection in a world of disconnection.

Comforting or inspiring as it might be, this hymn only goes halfway in bringing us the message of the text from John's gospel. The hymn implores God to be with us, to dwell or abide with us, in our darkness and distress. It says nothing about us abiding in God, or about the way we live connected to the vine, or about the fruitfulness that will flow, and that God expects from our mutual indwelling.

This text in John's gospel is part of Jesus' farewell discourse, his words to the disciples before he is arrested and crucified. Verse after verse is full of instruction and assurance about the continuing relationship that has been established between God and God's people in Jesus. Jesus tells them that his death will not sever that bond, that they are to remain in the vine, connected to the source of love, and in that way, Jesus will remain in them and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus talks about the hand of the gardener that will prune the branches for increased fruitfulness. That's not always an easy process, sometimes it feels like something that is pruned, lost or taken away from us is exactly what we want to hang on to, to make us feel comfortable or even worthy. That's a whole other reflection and worthy of time to ponder.

Does the simple act of collectively singing the old hymn offer something about what Jesus is saying through John's gospel? Does it give people a sense of being connected to each other and to a power that is greater than them? An experience of dwelling in the vine? Maybe our role, as church, is to interpret that experience, and to show, through the fruitfulness of love and grace, what it means to live the faith that lies within this hymn turned football-anthem. How do we tell the story of abiding in the wonder and mystery of God's abundant, challenging, life-giving love?

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Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

God of nourishment through the vine,
we bring our prayers for the world and
the communities we inhabit.

As we wonder about finding connection,
nourishment and healing we think of those
who struggle to find these things.

We hear of the need for pruning, discarding
and burning and yet many are pruned,
discarded or burnt through the imposition
and power of others or forces beyond their
control.

We pray for a world struggling in the face of
global pandemic - for our own country as it
squabbles about vaccinations despite our
privilege in relation to much of the world.
And so in particular we pray for Papua New
Guinea, Brazil, India, and many countries in
Europe who face rising death tolls or
infections despite the hope for vaccine relief.

We pray for those struggling to find equity of
access to vaccines, and give thanks for those
countries who find abundance and share
vaccines with neighbours.

We pray for all impacted through changes in
employment or Jobseeker supports, for small
businesses who will shut their doors or fear
what is coming.

We pray for our leaders as they find
challenges to cooperate, often blaming
others for failings. Bless the National Cabinet
as it meets regularly again to effect a better
rollout of vaccines in Australia.

As we reflect on a world that has changed
radically since early last year, we think of our
church and congregations in towns and
villages across Gippsland. Bless acts of love

and generosity that come through our
connection with Jesus Christ as the vine. Be
with us as we seek to discern the movement
of the Spirit in this 'new normal'. Grant us the
courage to prune and discard bits of us that
no longer bear fruit that we may be more
fruitful as we are shaped, fed and held in
love's outpouring.

And whatever struggles are before us, help us
to know through deep abiding that you are
with us, that as the sap flows through the
vine we are nourished and strengthened by
your love regardless of circumstance.

*You may choose to offer your own prayers for
the world, community, church and yourselves.*

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

As we make our offerings to God, may it be
from a place of abiding in the vine and
knowing rich and abundant blessings -
abiding in the source of life, love and hope.

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Notices

This weekly worship resource can be sent automatically to your email inbox (you can subscribe via our web page), and it also appears early on the web page to assist people who are leading worship. See:

<https://gippsland.unitingchurch.org.au/>

Singing - Abide with me alt. (tune: TIS 586)

Abide with me, as I abide with you.
Branch of the vine, our lives will bear much fruit.
Your strength and power, connected we must be.
Source of all love, always abide with me.

Gardener of life, your pruning hand is strong,
take all the dead wood that I drag along.
Burn all those burdens so I can be free
renewed by grace, O God, abide with me.

When life is dark, and hope is hard to find,
keep me secure, held strongly to the vine.
Don't let me lose my way when I can't see.
Through fearful storms, Jesus, abide with me.

Make us be fruitful in all that we do,
blessed with a joy, complete – a gift from you,
blooming in love for all the world to see.
Spirit of peace, abide with all, with me.

Words: Jennie Gordon
Music: William Henry Monk 1823-89 TIS 586
Used with permission

Blessing

As we are sent,
we are sent as those who
continue to abide -
in the God who calls and sends;
in the vine that nurtures and nourishes;
in order to grow fruit and to share fruit
with a hungry world.

As we are sent, so are we blessed:
Blessed with a joy, complete;
blooming in love for all the world to see.

Go, be blessed, go and bless
in the name of the Father, Son and Holy
Spirit. Amen

sacred secateurs

John 15: 1-8

O holy hand, good gardener
stomp with your Blundstones^[1]
worn and true
on crunchy earth made crisp with dew
along the neatly measured lanes
of earth caressed by sun and rains

and softly stretched upon the wire
my branches wait, they trail along
like arms, they're reaching;
still and strong
ready to embrace their death
or feel the blessing of your breath

O sacred secateurs, be quick
cut down the muddle of my ways
then burn the rubble where it lays
the remnants dead, of seasons gone
and growth that branched
too far from home

and when the winter's worst is past
may buds of hope swell full and keen
upon my limbs of tender green
where once the deadwood
held its sway
may new fruit greet the awakening day

Rev. Jennie Gordon
Dad & Daughter

^[1] Australian work boots

Contributors this week:

Rev. Ron Gordon - prayers from *Dad & Daughter*,
Prayers and poems on the gospel, Years A B & C.
Rev. Arnie Wierenga - Presbytery Minister
Rev. Jennie Gordon - Presbytery Minister

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