



Sunday July 11th, 2021 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

As we gather, let's catch our breath...
We become aware of the need to lay aside
many things...
We become aware of others who gather with us,
and of those who may be absent...
We light the candle and recall our reason
for gathering...
The light of Christ shines among us...

Call to worship

Blessed be God,
father of our Lord Jesus Christ
who has blessed us
with every Spiritual blessing.
We gather to offer
gratitude, praise and
to remember blessings;
to be sent
again
in Christ's name.
Let us worship God.

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

We come to the end of NAIDOC week and we
celebrate all that we can learn as we journey on,
First and Second peoples together. We
acknowledge a long rich history and life of the
traditional custodians where we gather. We name
them now ... and give thanks to God that our
church calls and commits us to covenant to each
other.

Singing Loving Spirit TiS 417

Loving Spirit, loving Spirit
you have chosen me to be -
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.

Like a mother you enfold me,
hold my life within your own,
feed me with your very body,
form me of your flesh and bone.

Like a father you protect me,
teach me the discerning eye,
hoist me up upon your shoulder,
let me see the world from high.

Friend and lover, in your closeness
I am known and held and blessed:
in your promise is my comfort,
in your presence I may rest.

Loving Spirit, loving Spirit
you have chosen me to be -
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.

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Prayer

God of our Lord Jesus Christ, giver of every
Spiritual blessing, we offer our thanks that you
have blessed us beyond our imagining.
Through you we find redemption, forgiveness of
trespasses through the richness of your grace.

But we know we often live as though we forget
these things. There are times our lives fail to
express blessing and grace.

As the apostle Paul reminds us in the letter he
wrote to the church of Ephesus, we pause to take
in grace upon grace, blessing upon blessing...

And we wonder what it means to be adopted as
children through Jesus Christ...

As we wonder and struggle to take in the depth
of your love for us, we hear again from the
apostle that you forgive our failings and call us to
life in the name of Christ. **Thanks be to God.**

Listening

Read: **Ephesians 1:3-14** and **Mark 6:14-29**

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

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Reflecting - Rev Arnie Wierenga

It's hard to know where to start with such a disturbing passage from the gospel of Mark, except to say that it is real.

We might remember that John the Baptist was a friend and cousin to Jesus. It was John who was there at the start of Jesus' ministry. It was John who had been the messenger for the cause - to proclaim Jesus was the one sent from God.

Yet none of this protected him from worldly privilege and abuse of power. Of course it didn't protect Jesus either, although often we hear his crucifixion as 'good news' rather than a brutal, unjust and untimely death.

Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* depicted the crucifixion as graphic and brutal, not sparing the viewer the reality of Roman torture. I remember it seemed important to feel deeply into this brutality, but also how empty I felt at the end. The film almost fully extinguished resurrection hope.

I suspect the disciples who took John's body and laid him in a tomb had little to hope for. But that changed soon after the disciples did similar for Jesus' and laid him to rest.

Soon they (and we) found renewed hope on the other side of the resurrection. Somehow death was no longer the end of things.

The apostle Paul speaks of many blessings and richness of God's grace. He reminds people of the resurrection that we find our adoption as the children of God through Christ's will and pleasure! Imagine that!

Imagine how words like that might have touched the otherwise despairing disciples who buried John. I wonder how your experience of the risen Christ has changed your view of things?

I believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. The witness of the women who discover an empty tomb, and then mysterious

encounters like the stranger walking the road to Emmaus invites us to see the world differently. Death remains real, but hope runs deeper.

It is the stuff that inspires Paul to write of many blessings to the Ephesian church. We've been adopted by God into life, he says. We have been blessed, we have been offered grace we've never known before. And my own experiences of the risen Christ gives greater strength than before. It is easier to face the harshness of an unjust world when we have hope.

We are marking the end of NAIDOC week today. This week is about celebrating Indigenous people, culture, history and presence. A few months back we noted things like *Sorry Day* because facing the truth of history is a vital step towards celebrating who we can become. (If you want to find out more, you could start by looking up the reason the Federal electoral seat in Gippsland of McMillan was changed recently to Monash).

As NAIDOC is for celebrating culture, there are many positive ways to give thanks to God for the history and culture that shapes this land we call Australia. If you're ready to explore more, the Synod has just released a *Covenanting Guide* that you can work through in your congregation, with a comprehensive list of resources, questions and suggestions: <https://victas.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/> Local conversations or yarning circles like we have in Wonthaggi are a great way of deepening understanding and celebrating who we are as first and second peoples. (If you want to know more, please ask us).

Returning to the gospel passage, people will continue, as before, to abuse power in the worst of ways. But we who are adopted into God's family, we who have hope through the resurrection of Christ are better equipped to do as Jesus has done - to speak out against injustice and abuse, and to do our bit to bring about the kingdom of God, celebrating the creative, life-giving power of love in the here and now.

Now all of that gives me great cause to hope for our future!

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Singing: In halls of wealth and power

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In halls of wealth and power
where shadowed deals are made,
The heartless ones devour;
the helpless are betrayed.
The ones who make decisions
seem confident and strong
Yet sometimes blur divisions
between the right and wrong.

When Herod chose to wander
from living as he should,
John preached with mighty thunder,
"Repent and do the good!"
Then power danced with anger;
revenge went dancing, too.
When they all join together,
what evil they will do!

O God of love and justice,
when we feel sure and strong,
May power never tempt us
to venture toward the wrong.
In all of our endeavors,
give wisdom, Lord, we pray,
That we may love our neighbors
and seek your kingdom way.

In halls of wealth and power,
in home and neighborhood,
May we reject the evil
and turn to what is good.
May justice dance with mercy
and service dance with grace;
May nations lift the lowly
till peace and love embrace.

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

God of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we wonder about
blessing upon blessing, we call our minds to
people, places and situations where blessing is
known, and also where blessing is needed.

We mark the end of NAIDOC week and the theme
healing country. We celebrate places of healing -
where truth brings about justice, and where gifts
are celebrated and acknowledged.

We bring to mind difficult stories of our history
that are not well known but through telling will
bring healing to this country. Grant us open
hearts and minds and the capacity to hear them.
Help us be curious about the places we live and
the stories that belong to them.

We give thanks for stories of celebration. If they
are not well known, help us hear them or be
tellers of good news in order to bring healing to
this country. Help us be curious about the places
we live and the stories that belong to them.

We pray for our country, our leaders both
Indigenous and others - for wisdom in their work
and for courage to work together to bring healing
to this country.

We pray for the Uniting Church, President Dr.
Diedre Palmer and president-elect Rev. Sharon
Hollis. Be with them in the coming meeting of the
National Assembly as for the first time it will be
online due to COVID. Bless them in their
continued leadership of the church, and be with
all the delegates who gather online this month,
with a planned face to face meeting next year. Be
with our church and the challenges we face, and
guide our conversations through the work of the
Holy Spirit that we may offer hope to our nation
and all who live here.

We pray for our local communities, for family and
friends. We pray for those impacted by recent
COVID restrictions or challenges with vaccines.
We pray for those who are lonely or who face
mental health struggles.

We offer our own prayers.

and we pray together in the prayer that Jesus
taught his disciples:

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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

We have been blessed with much as Paul reminds us. What might we offer God in response to grace upon grace? What might we offer others in God's name that brings them blessing and grace?

Notices

Pray for people across our church who will be attending the meeting of the National Assembly. Pray for our incoming president, Rev. Sharon Hollis.

Singing - Father in heaven TiS 465

Father in heaven, grant to your children
Mercy and blessing,
songs never ceasing,
Love to unite us, grace to redeem us
Father in heaven, father our God.

Jesus, redeemer, may we remember
Your gracious passion, your resurrection.
Worship we bring you,
praise we shall sing you
Jesus, redeemer, Jesus our lord.

Spirit descending, whose is the blessing,
Strength for the weary,
help for the needy,
Sealed in your kinship
yours be our worship
Spirit descending, spirit adored.

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Blessing

Go out, you blessed children of God.
Go knowing you are loved
and find your place
in Christ's will and pleasure.

Go and share blessing and grace
in the Spirit of your adoption.

Go to lend your heart and voice
to heal country,
to restore places,
and to bless all people
in the blessing that you have received.

Go now, with the blessing
of God almighty upon you,
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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