



Sunday Feb 20th, 2022 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

Psalm 37:7 Be still before the LORD,
and wait patiently...

Light the candle,
The light shines in the darkness
and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Call to worship

Loving God, draw us into this time of worship.
Help us to trust your presence
and to share your delight in all things.
Give us patience and stillness.
Open us to new understandings.
Forgive our weakness and strengthen our spirit
so that we can walk in your way,
reaching out in love,
in Jesus' name, **Amen.**

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional
custodians of this land and these waters. We pay
respect to elders past, present and emerging. As
First and Second Peoples walking together, we
commit ourselves to be people of the covenant,
listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

Singing - Let us sing to the God of salvation - TiS 52

Used with permission CCLI 206 729
W: Richard Thomas Bewes 1934 m: Trad melody

Let us sing to the God of salvation,
let us sing to the Lord our rock;
let us come to his house with thanksgiving,
let us come before the Lord and sing!
*Praise our maker, praise our saviour,
praise the Lord our everlasting king:
every throne must bow before him
God is Lord of everything!*

In his hand are the earth's deepest places,
and the strength of the hills is his;
all the sea is the Lord's, for he made it
by his hand the dry land was formed.

Praise our maker...

Let us worship the Lord our maker,
let us kneel to the Lord our God;
for we all are the sheep of his pasture
he will guide us by his powerful hand.

Praise our maker...

Let today be the time when you hear him!
May our hearts not be hard or cold,
lest we stray from the Lord in rebellion
as his people did in time of old.

Praise our maker...

Listening

Read: Psalm 37: 1-11, 39-40



Prayer

Psalm 37 invites us to trust in God,
to take delight in God
and to commit our way to God.
So we pray,

Source of light and life and love,
we bring ourselves to you again,
trusting that you hear us, that you accept us
and that you love us.

**Knowing that you long for us to draw nearer
and to walk in your way, we pause.
In the quiet we remember that we can trust you
and that we can be still and patient
in your presence. (time of quiet)**

Source of light and life and love,
we delight in your creative wonder.
Although we cannot see you directly,
we can see the work of your hands
in the world around us;
in the land and in the seas,
in the sky, in the creatures,

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in the faces of friends and strangers
and in the taste of strawberries,

open like the smile of a baby,
warm as a feathered nest,
strong like the sun, the wind, the surf,
and wiser than the midnight stars,

**Knowing that you long for us to draw nearer
and to walk in your way, we pause.**
**In the quiet we remember that we delight in you
and that we can be still and patient
in your presence.** *(time of quiet)*

Source of light and light and love,
we commit our way to you
acknowledging that too often
we don't follow the path as Jesus' disciples.
We find it easy to see the worst in others
and in ourselves.
We strike out with harm when we are fearful
and use words that diminish others.
We forget the blessing of mercy,
given and received.
Forgive us.
Forgive us.
Forgive us.
Help us to be lovers, not haters.
Help us to surprise our enemies with goodness,
answer those who speak evil with kindness
and to seek to understand and honour others
who think and live differently to us.

**Knowing that you long for us to draw nearer
and to walk in your way, we pause.**
**In the quiet we acknowledge that we stumble,
and we commit ourselves again to you,
remembering that we can be still and patient
in your presence.** *(time of quiet)*

Siblings in Christ, know this,
that our longing to live in God's way reaches out
and is met by the yearning of the Spirit of life
who reaches for us.
We are embraced, known, loved and forgiven.
Thank you God, what a delight!
Amen.

Listening

Read: Gen 45: 3-11, 15
Luke 6: 27-38

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

Reflecting - Rev. Deacon Wendy Elson

Oh, what a rich and wonderful set of readings the lectionary takes us through this week. Can you feel the vibe? If you wondered about the subversive and counter cultural claims regarding following Jesus, here is that reversal stuff in technicolour. Joseph radically forgives his brothers for the terrible treatment he has received at their hands. In fact, he asks them to move in!

The Psalm (CEB version) asks us to "live in the land and farm faithfulness", to "let go of anger" and rage and even fretting. In this we find a "surplus of peace"! Don't get upset because it may lead to evil. The 1 Corinthians passage acts as a caution to be focused on the nature of heavenly principles rather than earthly perspectives. Things as we know them will die and be resurrected in newness and revitalization. The shape of emergence and growth is in God's hands.

Luke is a radical turning on its head of everything we tend towards! Firstly, we must listen. Oh dear, that is hard to do in itself. Our way of living is geared toward being busy and distracted, not listening. We are asked to do the opposite of our own inclination and repay poor treatment for good. Even violence is to be met with peaceful response. We are to love and forgive our neighbour. OK so my neighbours aren't too bad. But I am also asked to love and forgive my enemies. Oh, that is much harder, and from my point of view, it's easier to preach it than to live it. This is not the sort of love of popular culture and love songs. It is deep and abiding and tough love. It is a different kindness that prevails in the face of the unkindness of another. This forgiveness is not skin deep but a truly subversive heart forgiveness in grace and mercy and compassion. It even calls us to forgive ourselves in grace and mercy because (as my dad used to say) we can "be our own greatest enemy" at times.



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There are many quotes on forgiveness, some making it a 'divine' value and others see it as a form of revenge. Some mention the importance of forgiveness to achieve healing. Some refer to whether or not the other person is contrite and repentant.

A word of caution here because there is a much deeper conversation and sensitivity around some of the truly evil things which have been (and are) done to people, and I hear the struggle to forgive and come to terms with such pain. This passage does not endorse the people subjecting others to ongoing abuse and oppression. Archbishop Desmond Tutu defined forgiveness as "*the capacity to make a new start. Forgiveness is the grace by which we enable the other person to get up, and get up with dignity, to begin anew. In the act of forgiveness, we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to change.*" But he also believed that this is not the same as denial or forgetting, and I would perhaps add excusing. Deeds which harm others need to be owned up to and dealt with.

It seems certain that to truly love, we need to forgive. I think this radical passage in Luke calls us to forgive in the measure we have been forgiven, freely, radically, totally, generously and mercifully. God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked, and is merciful to all.

Forgiveness is revolutionary. Love is revolutionary. Kindness is revolutionary. May we live out this revolution.

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

Today is the World Day of Social Justice and this is reflected in our prayer. You might want to have some candles ready to light for particular prayer points.

God whose love extends beyond our imagining
we pray for our world,
for our communities
and for ourselves.

Across the world there are so many places of hurt and harm, so many people impacted, so much environmental destruction, so many issues of injustice that we cannot name them all. We bring our prayers for the world to you:

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You might want to light candles for particular peoples or places ...

**Where there is war, bring peace
where there is famine, bring food
where there is oppression, bring release
where there is apathy, bring compassion
where there is hatred, bring love**

In our communities, in our neighbourhoods, in our families, there are so many people living from day to day in situations of poverty, abuse, illness and despair. We bring our prayers for our communities and families to you:

You might want to light candles for particular peoples or places ...

**Where there is brokenness bring restoration
where there is hurt, bring healing
where there is despair, bring hope
where there is confusion, bring understanding
where there is hatred, bring love**

Within each of us, there are aspects of our lives that long to be made whole; mental and physical health, spiritual restoration, relationship healing, confidence in capacity and identity, overcoming fear, embracing change, growing in love ... We bring our prayers for ourselves to you:

You might want to light candles for particular aspects of your life ...

**Come to us, Spirit of life,
restore us and make us whole
so that we can be bearers of light
and move amidst the darkness
with abundant love and blessing,
as we say together:**

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.



Sunday Feb 20th, 2022 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

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

Passing the peace

May the Peace of God dwell with you:
and also with you.

Offering

Bless what we bring, generous Spirit of life. Bless these gifts and our lives. Use them and use us to bring love into the most surprising places and to join with your work in the world, In Jesus' name, **Amen.**

Notices

Today is the **World Day of Social Justice**. What does that mean for you? Have you engaged with Just Act? It's the social justice unit at the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. *We equip church members and non-church members to take action on issues that matter most to them.* If you haven't already, you can join in their efforts and sign up to the mailing list at <https://justact.org.au/>.

Singing - Help us accept each other TiS 648

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Help us accept each other
as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother,
each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us
and bring us to believe:
we are ourselves accepted
and meant to love and live.

Teach us, O Lord, your lessons,
as in our daily life
we struggle to be human
and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people,
for all - not just for some,
to love them as we find them
or as they may become.

Let your acceptance change us
so that we may be moved
in living situations
to do the truth in love;
to practice your acceptance
until we know by heart
the table of forgiveness
and laughter's healing art.

Lord, for today's encounters
with all who are in need,
who hunger for acceptance,
for justice and for bread,
we need new eyes for seeing,
new hands for holding on:
renew us with your Spirit;
Lord, free us, make us one!

Blessing

Go now into the world in peace.
Be of good courage.
Hold fast that which is good.
Render to no one evil for evil.
Strengthen the fainthearted.
Support the weak.
Help the afflicted.
Show love to everyone.

Love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
and may the blessing of God,
Source, Son and Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.
Amen.

(adapted from a benediction in many prayer books)

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