



Second Sunday in Lent, March 13th, 2022 The Fig Tree Worship Resource



Gathering & Lighting the Candle

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

This Shaker song is believed to be written by Joseph Brackett (1797–1882). The tune *Simple Gifts* can be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple_Gifts

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

Call to worship

Gather us in, Spirit of life,
make us ready to be released
from whatever holds us back.
Make us ready to be confronted,
by the truth we'd rather ignore.
Make us ready to be loved
even when we're feeling unlovely.
Make us ready to be channels
of your outpouring of peace,
as we journey on with Jesus
in this hour and forever,
Amen.

Acknowledging



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 - Seek, O seek the Lord - TiS 464

Prayer

Selected verses of Psalm 27.

27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

The darkness may descend, but your light, Gracious God, brings me hope, quells my fear.

27:4 One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

Keep me near to you,
let me dwell beside you and abide,
rising and sleeping in the delight of your love.

27:7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

Let your grace extend to hear me
and let me hear your answer.
I have so much to confess,
so many questions,
so much gratitude to share with you.

27:8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek.

My heart wants to look you in the eye,
to tell you of my burdens and delights.

27:9 Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

*(take a few moments to bring to God
your wonder and confusion,
your blessing and confession.)*

27:13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Your goodness reaches out - even to us,
even now, even this moment
and we drink deeply from that well of grace.
We are forgiven, thanks be to God.

27:14 Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

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Listening

Read: Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35

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

Reflecting - Rev. Jennie Gordon

This passage in Luke's gospel begins with immediacy, at that very hour, and ends with eternity. We are shown the determination of Jesus to continue the course of his work and to not be tempted away from the journey to the cross. We are invited to dwell under the wings of a loving mother-hen God, if only we can repent and accept the invitation.

There's a particular domestic experience that divides our UCA Synod of Vic/Tas, and it is present in the gospel reading this week. It is something that Victorians know about and may well have experienced, and our Tasmanian siblings hopefully never will. A fox threatening the henhouse, a predator on the prowl.

The Pharisees have come to warn Jesus. Maybe out of kindness, or maybe this could be interpreted as a return of the tempter from the wilderness, trying to turn Jesus from his mission, from the cross. "Tell that fox...", says Jesus and those of us from the mainland shudder, "Tell that fox that I'm going to keep going, today and tomorrow, to continue to love and not to hide, and on the third day, I will finish my work." This third day points to the resurrection, but I wonder if, first, it points to the cross. Is it at the cross that Jesus' work is complete? On Good Friday we will hear these words from John's gospel; 'it is finished'.

Currently the world is in turmoil, experiencing what might be described as a predator on the prowl. We watch in horror as war escalates and wonder if we have learned anything in the last 80 years. As Ukraine gathers her men-chicks to defend, exiles coming home to fight, she shelters her most vulnerable as best she can under her wings, some fleeing to neighbouring places of sanctuary. Meanwhile Russia destroys the life, livelihoods, and land that it most wants to control and inhabit. God have mercy. We have not been willing to learn, to repent, to be gathered as one humanity.

Jesus says to the Pharisees, "See, your house is left to you." Pyrrhic victory. They kill the one who is the living house of God, to protect the house. As Will Willimon, contemporary theologian notes: "Their house is the temple, this great solid rock that represented Israel's relationship to Yahweh... Here is a warning to any who take security in the solidity of religious membership, institutions, and traditions." The hearers of Luke's gospel know about the fall of the temple.

Jesus, moving towards his own fate, is concerned for ours. Here is the good news! There is time to turn around, and this is Lent, 'a time for turning and turning until we come 'round right.' This maternal image of God as mother-hen doesn't get much airplay, we seem to be more drawn to the image of the lamb, or the lion for Jesus, rather than the chook. Is it because we struggle to imagine God as mother? Oh ..., so many struggles.

May this time of struggle, this wilderness of bewilderment, this Lenten journey, be a place of transformation for you. May you find the courage to submit to sheltering under the wings of God, turning from those things that cause destruction and distraction, knowing you are loved and forgiven. May it be so for you, for me, for all God's creatures, today, tomorrow and for all eternity. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Singing - Be thou my vision TiS 547

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

We pray for each other, our families and friends and the wider community.

God whose face is shown to us in the love we have for each other. In the quiet of our hearts, we bring before you those who are hurting, asking for your comforting light to be present in their darkness and your healing hand to hold them.

We pray for all those people down the east coast of these lands, experiencing the devastating aftermath of floods. Be in the hand of neighbour and stranger, reaching out to offer comfort and practical help where possible.

We pray for our church.

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Jesus, who teaches us not to put our trust in bricks and stones, lest an empty house be all we inherit, we are yearning to find ways of being church in our ever-emerging circumstances. Help us to honour our history without worshipping it. Help us to respect our traditions without being entombed by them. Help us to keep our eyes, ears and hearts open to the new things you are doing, and give us the courage and energy to join in.

We pray for the church in other places and for those churches that face challenges we can scarcely imagine, such as Orthodox Christians in Ukraine and Russia. We pray for places that face great hardship due to COVID, especially places where vaccines and medical resources are scarce. We pray for the people of Ukraine who face a war not of their making. As we feel powerless from a distance, yet we offer our prayers for families in fear, those torn apart, those seeking refuge and those grieving.

As we are lost for words, Jesus still invites us to pray this prayer that is uttered around the world, including in Russia and Ukraine:

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 forever. Amen.

Passing the peace

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

Offering

Bless these gifts we bring, Spirit of hope,
money, time, energy, talents, love...
bless all these things
that they may enable and become
expressions of the compassion of Jesus
towards those who need it most,
Amen.

Notices

March 17 is National Close the Gap Day (First People's Health). From the website:

<https://antar.org.au/campaigns/national-close-gap-day>

For more than a decade now, Australians from every corner of the country, in schools, businesses and community groups, have shown their support for Close the Gap by marking National Close the Gap Day on the third Thursday of March each year.

This National Close the Gap Day, we have an opportunity to send our governments a clear message that Australians value health equality as a fundamental right for all. On National Close the Gap Day we encourage you to get involved and host an activity in your workplace, home, community, (church) or school.

Our aim is to bring people together to share information, and most importantly, to take meaningful action in support of achieving health equality for First Nations Peoples.

Singing - God of grace ... TiS 611

Blessing

Go out into the world
in the power of the Spirit;
in all things, at all times,
remember that Christ is with you;
make your life your worship
to the praise and glory of God.
And all the people say: **Amen.**

(from Uniting in Worship 2 p185)

Liturgy & Reflection:

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Beneath the Fig Tree

a daily Lenten space:

For each day of Lent we will offer a bible reading and a comment or question for you to sit with. You could create a space that you go to each day at a particular time, light a candle, journal the images and thoughts that come to you, listen to music, or simply sit in silence. The prayer words might remain with you for the day and open you to the needs of others and the yearnings within.

Monday March 14th

Read: Isaiah 55: 2

How do you invest your thoughts, time, energy, money and spirit? What does it mean to 'eat what is good'?

Prayer words: bread / satisfy

Tuesday March 15th

Read: Isaiah 55:3

How do we draw near to God and listen deeply? What image does 'steadfast love' evoke in you?

Prayer words: covenant / love

Wednesday March 16th

Read: Luke 13: 6

Do you recall a time when you have been disappointed in the lack of fruitfulness of yourself or others?

Prayer words: looking / found

Thursday March 17th

Read: Luke 13: 7

When things don't happen how and when we want, how long are we prepared to wait before we put our energies somewhere else?

Prayer words: none / wasting

Friday March 18th

Read: Luke 13: 8

Are there resources that you have that will bring fruitfulness in a barren place? How and where might you invest those resources?

Prayer words: alone / dig

Saturday March 19th

Read: Luke 13: 9

What does a 'space of grace' look like? How do you know how long it should be?

Prayer words: fruit / down

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