



## Third Sunday in Lent, March 20th, 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](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

To all who thirst, come to the living water  
To all who hunger, come to the living bread  
To all who seek, come to the guiding way  
Come let us worship.

### Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander  
Christian Congress

We worship on different lands and gather on the many lands now called Australia. We acknowledge that all the lands are home to the ancestors. We commit ourselves to listening to stories told of past and present, and to hear the dreaming and hope of the future.

On these many lands called Australia we acknowledge the elders past, present and those emerging. May we stand drawn together through reconciliation and respect.

### Singing Come, O God of all the earth TIS 181



### Prayer\*

*In this time of Lent, or repentance and renewal, we pray:*

Come to us, Mother of the ages,  
Weave us into faith.  
Come to us, Wisdom in humanity,  
Spin us into freedom.  
Come to us, Nurturer of community,  
Stitch us into your tapestry of life,  
That we may know the colour of hope,  
Experience the texture of grace,  
And celebrate the fabric of wholeness  
In the mystery of your creativity. Amen.

O God, you search us out and know us,  
and all that we are is open to you.  
We confess that we have sinned.  
Kyrie eleison, **Ancient One, have mercy**

We use our power to dominate  
and our weaknesses to manipulate:  
Kyrie eleison, **Ancient One, have mercy**

We despair of changing the world  
and neglect to change even ourselves:  
Kyrie eleison, **Ancient One, have mercy**

We fail to integrate spirit and flesh  
and forfeit our wholeness and dignity:  
Kyrie eleison, **Ancient One, have mercy**

We turn to you, O God of infinite mercy;  
we renounce evil;  
we claim your love;  
we desire to be made whole.

In the wisdom of God,  
the world did not know God through wisdom;  
for God's foolishness is wiser than human  
wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than  
human strength.

Hear then God's Word of Wisdom to us in Jesus:  
'Your sins are forgiven.' **Thanks be to God.**



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#### ***Listening***

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Read: Isaiah 55:1-9, 1 Cor 10: 1-13 &  
Luke 13:1-9

Here we are, called to God's service.

**Let it be with us according to your Word.**

#### ***Reflecting - Rev. Deacon Wendy Elson***

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So, which is it do you think? There seems to be so many mixed messages about whether suffering and pain are the result of sin, or whether God treats all people alike.

It is tempting to think of faith as a buffer, an "if all else fails" plan to keep safe and protected. Instead, it is clear in these passages that we take on all that the Cross represents. But it is also an amazing invitation to travel on a deeper path of richness and meaning. Any notion that suffering is punishment from God for our sin is rejected. The reverse is also clear, that blessing is a reward from God, the 'prosperity' gospel that says we can in some way deserve to flourish due to our own faithfulness. Jesus' love for the least and the lost, God's presence with us in good times and in bad is a rejection of that. We are in constant need of God's grace and mercy.

Pain is insistent in its need to be engaged with and it cannot be ignored. We must look into what causes there are for suffering and injustice. We need to face the challenges presented by suffering and never settle into apathy and complacency. The passages challenge us to show fruitfulness. This image of the Figtree is dear to many of us in Gippsland who have been challenged to face our times of being barren and withered. We have been called to do some gardening and we are constantly pruning and letting go of that which holds us back. We have mulched and composted and are sending our roots down deep into fertile and rich soil to find enrichment. We are seeking verdant new growth and discovering what exciting missional and collegial opportunities there are for 'growing figs'. As in all gardening endeavours, it necessitates

constant review and assessment and responding to different climate and weather conditions. We continually ask ourselves about how we are serving our communities and caring for the least and the lost. When we notice pain in our world and in ourselves it is a call to listen to what is happening and how we can best respond. When we see pain in others, we seek ways to respond with compassion rather than speculation and self-righteousness. Most of all, us 'gardeners' are reliant on the grace of the true Gardener. First Corinthians reminds us that we don't stand on our own, we cannot rely on the growth but must continually work toward it and test the soil. The Psalm (63) calls us to be constant in our intimacy with God, just as God is constant and steadfast in love for us. Isaiah also calls us to rely on God and let go of shallowness, seeking depth and richness in our growth and relationships. It is a reminder that when we live from our 'small' selves, our ego, we are not in connection. We are busy being autonomous rather than authentic. We are living an illusion.

So, these passages are perhaps not what they appear at first glance. We are not cautioned to stay connected because to do otherwise would bring punishment and to do so would bring reward. Rather, we need to be fully connected to God in order to grow and flourish like a well nurtured fig tree. May you be nourished by deep connection and fruitful in your life in Christ.

#### ***Singing - As the deer pants TiS 703***

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#### ***Responding:*** ***Prayers for World & Community***

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God of wonder and of love, we have heavy hearts today and in this time of turning anew to you, we pray.

As *National Close the Gap Day* has come and gone, we pray again for renewed efforts in healing and restoring relationships with our Aboriginal siblings in Christ, so all who dwell on



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and in these lands now called Australia hear and respond to the stories shared.

As creation groans the earth warms and the droughts worsen in places and fires become increasingly savage. Yet we have seen the widespread and incomprehensible damage of floods inflicted down the Eastern part of this land. We ask for strength, resilience, well directed grief and anger as those affected begin the process of cleaning and rebuilding. May those who are sent to assist now and into the future walk beside with compassion and love offering the hand of Christ.

For the many hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian people who have fled their homes, fleeing from violence not of their making, but violence they are caught up in, may they find safety in neighbouring countries as they open their borders to those who ask for safe passage.

We pray for Orthodox Christians in Ukraine and Russia wondering what Lent and Easter will look like this year. May their hearts be filled with strength and hope as they share with Christians throughout the world in solidarity. May all people of faith, and of no faith, uphold Ukraine, Russia, and all places in civil wars.

We pray for leaders of the world and of world faiths that they may work together in harmony and be united for the wellbeing of all people, of all first nations peoples and for the healing of the planet.

As we journey through Lent, may we always be turning our gaze toward God. May God of love and mercy heal our hurts and pains, hear our joys and celebrations and increase in us capacity to reach out a hand to those who ask.

Creator Spirit, hear our prayers, in the name of God and Holy Trinity we say **Amen**.

In the words most comfortable to you, from wherever you are, we say in unity...

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

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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***

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The world groans in pain, we are not at peace with the land. People suffer in pain, we are not at peace with one another. Let us turn to the God of Peace, Spirit of Peace to bind us together and be at peace with creation and all which dwells on it.

*You may like to hold a Eucalyptus leaf as a sign of peace and unity.*

### ***Offering***

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Holy God, Wisdom Spirit, may the money we give be used equitably and with care. We ask you give wisdom and discernment to those who will disperse it. May we give with a willingness and openness to your calling to be pilgrim people moving towards a promised goal. We pray through Jesus Christ our God.

### ***Notices***

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This Sunday marks the 3rd anniversary of The Fig Tree Project in the Presbytery of Gippsland. This parable of the barren fig tree in Luke's gospel was the story used by the Spirit to lead us into our adventure and is central to our ministry and mission. Each congregation/faith community is seen as a full expression of the church, planted to be fruitful, within a particular and unique environment and deserving of grace and care. Our ministers are called into one of six Ministry Teams across Gippsland and support each other, sharing gifts and skills to nourish our people in



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their faith and fruitfulness in the gospel. Thanks be to God!

### Singing - O God our help in ages past TIS 47

### Sending out & Blessing\*

May you carry God's Wisdom,  
Speak forth God's Word,  
And embody God's Presence  
Wherever you are.

And now, the blessing of the Holy Trinity of Love be upon you:

May God take your hand as you go,  
Christ be your constant companion,  
And the Spirit guide you on the Way  
This day and evermore. Amen.

### The Fig Tree Blessing\*\* (tune: CARLISLE TIS 234)

Within this space of grace  
be nourished, known and blessed.  
The earth below, the sky above  
be fruitful in God's love.

### Other Song Suggestions

- Christ be our Light (Oregon Catholic Press)
- In water we grow (TIS 494)
- You shall go out with Joy (TIS 755)

## *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 21st**

*Read: 2 Cor 5:16*

How can you see others from God's point of view rather than a human point of view?

*Prayer words: regard / view*

### **Tuesday March 22nd**

*Read: 2 Cor 5: 17*

What might it mean for you to be 'made new' in Christ, and what needs to 'pass away' in that process? What might that mean for the church?

*Prayer words: passed / become*

### **Wednesday March 23rd**

*Read: 2 Cor 5:18*

Does this passage convey to you a sense of God's longing, God's reaching out to us in Christ? How might you respond? How might your church respond?

*Prayer words: reconciled / reconciliation*

### **Thursday March 24th**

*Read: Luke 15: 17*

Has there been a time when you have 'come to yourself' and changed the direction of your life towards God? Can you share that story with others?

*Prayer words: bread / hunger*

### **Friday March 25th**

*Read: Luke 15: 20*

Place yourself in this scene - where are you, how does that feel? Can you imagine those arms of forgiveness and welcome? Are they yours, or are they for you?

*Prayer words: compassion / around*

### **Saturday March 26th**

*Read: Luke 15: 29*

Is it possible that your church community feels taken for granted, overlooked and serving others without celebration? Might you explore that together?

*Prayer words: slave / celebrate*

*\* from Uniting in Worship 2*

*\*\* words by Rev. Jennie Gordon*

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