



Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 3rd, 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

The Lord says,
"Do not consider the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;" (Isaiah 43: 18-19)

Let us worship God.

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 - Made in God's likeness TiS 671



Prayer

God of new and lifegiving things, we turn our attention to you and wonder at all that springs forth by your hand.

We offer our thanks and praise that where we see oppressive and immovable powers you call us to perceive life and liberation. As the prophet recalls, you give drink to us that we might declare our praise to you.

But often we struggle with addiction to oppressive powers because we see no other way.

Forgive us when we fail to perceive the new thing you do to bring us hope and liberation.

Forgive us when our motivations are mixed and obscured from others and even ourselves.

Forgive us when we fail to see beauty in extravagant love and devotion and mete out grace as though it can be exchanged in monetary terms.

Restore our vision, show us ways to anoint and bless and offer grace with nothing less than God's abundance until we discover again that you do a new thing. In the name of Christ we are restored and made new. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Listening

Read: Isaiah 43:16-21

John 12:1-8

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



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Reflecting - Rev. Deacon Marian Bisset

You will always have the poor with you, Jesus told Judas. Why? Did this mean Jesus had a streak of cruelty, or *c'est le vie* about him? The comment appears to contradict everything Jesus taught during his soon to end ministry years. The words are echoed from Deuteronomy 15:11, "there will never cease to be needy on the earth...open your hand to the poor and needy". This is perhaps what Jesus meant with the comment to Judas to give assistance without question.

Open your hand to the poor and needy, exactly how do we manage that in a world disturbed and out of balance with itself? Recently I heard Brianna Casey, CEO of *Foodbank Australia* talking about the increasing food insecurity in Australia. In 2021 over one million people were assisted by *Foodbank*, each month. Twelve million people over the year; the task is overwhelming and that's before we look outside our own land. I don't want to be a complete doomsday prophet, so the flip side to the figure is one million people each month were able to put food on the table because others had "open[ed] their hand to the poor and needy."

Deuteronomy goes on to describe the way in which people forgive and then act in a just and generous way towards others. This is possibly what Jesus was referencing in the story with Mary and Judas. The tension between one who freely gives everything to another and the one whose actions appear to be magnanimous, but whose interests are self-serving. What does this mean for us in our responses now to injustices in the world, or in our own local area? What do we do when we are faced with climate change, where we see the 'once in a hundred year' events happening more frequently, or hearing 'unprecedented' become the new overused word in political rhetoric? Are we moved to action to hold out a hand to the hurting, to offer food to

the hungry or to give safety to those we know are in danger?

Judas protested at the excessive waste of money and suggested the oil could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Unlike Mary, Judas hid his own greed under the mantle of a kind gesture. It was a misguided gesture and one Jesus saw straight through. We all know people or organisations who speak the words, but whose actions are left wanting.

Mary gave herself completely to offer kindness, hospitality, and care to Jesus. She bathed his filthy and rough feet and she covered them in a beautiful expensive oil. I can only imagine how that might have felt for Jesus, how in that moment Jesus was shown tender love, care, and outrageous generosity.

Both Mary and Judas model very different approaches to how we can respond to the injustice we encounter. I, like every person over the past few weeks has been horrified and distressed at the level of violence and destruction in Ukraine. I, like every person will be asking ourselves what can we do from our place here? I, like everyone, have no answer to that question.

What the story of Jesus, Mary and Judas give us is a model to follow and to act when it seems insurmountable. Jesus' way offers justice, compassion, love and importantly the belief God is always with us. As we come to the most holy time in the Christian year and walk through the final days of Jesus' life, we will be reminded again of our call to stand up to injustice and to speak for the ones who can't speak and to witness to God's healing love and outrageous generosity offered to all.

Singing - A prophet woman TiS 696

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Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

Liberating God, too often we struggle to believe that a new thing can bring about hope and life. We look despairingly from a distance at the indiscriminate military assault by Russia on the Ukraine and wonder what new and good can happen from here.

As we recall the gospel act of love from Mary towards Jesus, we hear other voices like those of Miroslav Volf who remind us that God is love.

As God is love we see a new thing. Ukrainian Orthodox priest Fyodor Raychynets is one who continues to defy those who seek his safe passage from the warzone. He knows that God is love and that love means he must stay. Offering food, water, chocolate, a listening ear and human compassion, he brings hope to soldiers and civilians alike where it seems impossible.

So we pray for Father Fyodor and all who embody the love of God - in warzones, within families, among world leaders, amidst fighting battalions, among activists, for those seeking truth against censorship and misinformation.

We pray for all who look for things new and wait for them to spring forth in God's name. We think of those seeking a way through the challenges of the COVID pandemic. We pray for those finding it difficult to find ways through rising living costs. We pray for those anxious about rising interest rates. We pray for all who find themselves in need in a world disturbed and out of balance with itself.

As we turn our attention to Australia, we pray for those who are hoping to make a difference in the political realm. We pray for whistle-blowers and truth tellers that they may usher light and hope beyond backroom deals and political spin.

We pray for a church that continues to navigate a pandemic and reimagine who we can be. We pray for our Uniting Church President, Rev. Sharon

Hollis in her leadership. We pray for the Moderator of the Synod of Victoria & Tasmania, Rev. Denise Liersch as she prepares to hand over this important leadership role to Rev. David Fotheringham in a few months. Bless David in his preparation as well.

Loving God, we pray for those near to us, for all who feel lost, isolated or overwhelmed with grief.

We offer our personal prayers in a time of silence.

When we come to the end we remember that you invite us to see new things springing forth despite a world that is disturbed and out of balance. So we pray with a renewed sense of hope as you taught us:

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

God of Jesus Christ, open our hearts to your grace and generosity. Inspire us to be people of extravagant love as shown us by Mary as she anointed the feet of Jesus. May these offerings move us beyond self-interest to a genuine desire to love others as you have loved us. Amen.

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Notices

Next week will be Palm Sunday. Is there an ecumenical march you can join? Do you need to source palm branches for your own walk of faith?

Melbourne will have an annual *Walk for Justice for Refugees* beginning at the State Library of Victoria at 2pm on Sunday 10th.

Hobart has a *Lives in Limbo* Installation at Parliament Lawns, on Saturday 9th from 12-2pm.

Singing - Forth in your name TiS 571

Blessing

Inspired by the actions of Mary towards Jesus and in the knowledge that through God the old will pass away and new things will spring forth, let's go with a renewed vision of extravagant love to share for the sake of a disturbed and out of balance world.

As you go may the blessing of God - Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with you now and always. Amen.

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 April 4th - Read: Psalm 118:1

Can you imagine a love that lasts forever? Give thanks to God for this unending, anchoring love. How does this impact your living and your love for others?

Prayer words: good / forever

Tuesday April 5th - Read: Psalm 118:24

How might you rejoice for the gift of each day? What does that look like to others you might meet? Does your congregation delight in each day? If so, how?

Prayer words: made / glad

Wednesday April 6th - Read: Luke 19:37

Could you imagine yourself in that crowd? What are you shouting? Who is with you? What have you seen of the goodness of God that you could shout out loud?

Prayer words: multitude / power

Thursday April 7th - Read: Luke 19:38

Can you hear the echoes of the birth narrative in this song of glory? Is it hard to sing, knowing what's coming? What does 'peace in heaven' mean to you?

Prayer words: peace / heaven

Friday April 8th - Read: Luke 19:39

Here come words of warning... make them stop. What makes you stop? What silences you from speaking gospel truth to power? How might that change?

Prayer words: order / stop

Saturday April 9th - Read: Luke 19:40

Jesus' reply speaks of inevitability, that even inanimate stones are screaming 'glory', paving the way to his death. Are you in the crowd? What can you hear?

Prayer words: silent / shout

Presbytery of Gippsland

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