



Sunday May 29th, 2022 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering

Today is Reconciliation Sunday in the Uniting Church, as part of National Reconciliation Week. For information about what the Uniting Church is committed to in our covenantal relationship with First Peoples, check out <https://victas.uca.org.au/about-us/first-peoples/>

This is also the beginning of the ecumenical Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Call to worship

(light the candle)

Christ, the Light that shines in the darkness
Shine on us.

You call us to oneness
Join us together in your love.

You call us to embody your love
and to share it with the world.
**Speak to us
and show us how to live out this calling.**

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and these waters. We pay our respect to elders past and present, and commit ourselves and our church to listening, learning and keeping the covenant as we walk together, First and Second Peoples.

Singing - We are your people TiS 468



Prayer

Jesus prayed, "that they may all be one."
**We confess that we, your people,
are far from being one.**

We have competed
when we should have been cooperating.
We have divided
and fought over points of doctrine.
We have insisted that everyone in the Church
should share our key beliefs.
We have failed to love another
in the way that you have loved us.
We have squabbled
when we should have been serving.
We have failed to be
your effective witnesses in the world
because of our divisions.

Forgive us and help us become one.
(Silent prayer)

Jesus said, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." John 17:21

Help us, we pray,
to be people of faith who embody your love,
justice, mercy and compassion.
Help us, we pray,
to work with our fellow Christians
to serve your world.

**Grant unity and reconcile your Church
so that it may shine the light of Christ
into the darkness of the world. Amen.**

Listening

Read: **Acts 16:16-34;**
John 17:20-26

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

Reflecting - Rev. Ian Brown

"Freedom and its costs"

You might be excused for feeling relieved that the finger pointing, argy-bargy of electioneering is past us now for a while and there won't be so many ugly yellow full page ads assaulting our eyes when reading the news. A cost of our democratic freedom?

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I'm inclined to think that as a community of faith we should be more concerned about our openness to wonder, unity and praise – openness to God, than to others. It's a pattern hinted at in our stories.

It's the last week of the Easter season; last of stories of the new church from Acts before Pentecost. In Philippi, Paul and Silas are headed for the place of prayer; that's their first priority and there they talk with people. But when Paul saw a slave girl in torment, he was moved to action.

The action grows out of his experience of God; a God who wants abundant life and wholeness for all. Situations of injustice and problems in the community are not new, not unique and not the whole story. The healing is costly for Paul, but prison becomes a place not for defence mounting but for prayer and praise, and then it's the venue for freedom and release.

Compassion for the vulnerable isn't easy to engender. Respect for captors, care for jailers, and the enslaved, seeing the bigger picture and acting out of that are incredibly high ideals. Mostly we excuse ourselves from practising these ideals, but this is not any old call to live by a particular set of values.

I read Behrouz Boochani's, 'No Friend but the Mountains'. He describes detention on Manus Island; not pretty reading! The cruelty of the system dehumanises, makes persons numbers to queue for everything, from breakfast to a band-aid. Prison takes away the right to choose, the humanity of self and dignity, living in conditions worse than squalor. His choice for dental treatment, as a better option than our Australian care, was more than disturbing. Most of that chapter is resolved, but still asks us, what values do we live by?

Paul and his friends are miraculously released much more quickly. This is the sort of miracle we still need for innocent detainees today, but coming to agreement isn't easy.

If we have any oneness in our church, it's founded in Jesus. If there's any compassionate reaching out, it has its roots in Jesus too. And the hallmark of both is self-giving love.

In Paul's story, the unexpected freedom of the gospel breaks the power of the demonic over the slave, and her owner is furious. Paul bears the cost. The unexpected freedom of the gospel breaks the power of the chains in the Philippi prison and releases Paul and Silas, but they wait rather than run.

The unexpected freedom of the gospel releases the jailer and his family. There are many situations we could point to in our world today – but it would be unfair to say this freedom will always bring release or relief in our time. And we can't always expect someone to bear the cost, or to pay it ourselves.

These events in the Bible and in our lives are signs of resurrection life, of new life begun in our times. They aren't the fulfilment of all our hopes or the consummation of God's new kingdom. These are a foretaste and revealing glimpse of a new reality. Easter newness is a reality that we have the opportunity to respond to and to live in sympathy with.

It's a reality that's consistent with John: 'that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe.' Jesus is the unity that gives hope and life.

Freedom in the present might be freedom despite chains and prison bars. Or it might be the freedom to work for an end to oppression. In this faith, we have freedom to see the world as it should be and to live by that picture; to do something about making the vision more real.

Can we find hope for more just and humane treatment for refugees, find peace, address issues of reconciliation, and the gap in life expectancy and health outcomes for our First Nations people or offer a hand to frail or lonely people? We can

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all work towards new glimpses of the surprising and freeing power of resurrection life.

May it be the growing reality; in us and through us, to God's glory. Amen.

Singing - This is my will TiS 641

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

O God, you love us and you love this world and its people, and you invite us to bring our prayers to you. We look around us, and we watch the daily news and we are overwhelmed by so much that is wrong, so much hurt and hatred, so many wars, and by so many needs that need addressing. So, we pray, may your Spirit prompt us and lead us in our prayers.

silent prayer

We pray for our world, remembering before you all who are suffering, especially those caught up in war and conflict. Especially we pray for the people of The Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan.

O God, in the struggle of life.

Be our strength and guide.

We pray for refugees and asylum seekers, wherever they are in the world. We pray also for those generous people who are taking them in, and providing them with food and shelter.

O God, in the struggle of life.

Be our strength and guide.

We pray for all the children of the world and for their teachers. We pray that all children might grow in freedom and have the chance to learn and reach their potential. Be with those charities that give poor children a helping hand.

O God, in the struggle of life.

Be our strength and guide.

We pray for all who are imprisoned by mental torment or the abuse of others. We ask for release for all who are held captive by substance abuse. We pray for all who feel that there is no future in life, especially the young.

O God, in the struggle of life.

Be our strength and guide.

We remember Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi, and pray for all those who are in prison. We especially pray for those who, like them, are imprisoned because of their beliefs. We pray that they may be strengthened and encouraged, and that they may receive justice. We also pray for those who are gaoled because of crime.

We pray for them that they may find new ways forward, and we pray for prison chaplains and prison ministries.

O God, in the struggle of life.

Be our strength and guide.

O God, who loves us, we pray for one another. We pray for the healing of wounds, the strengthening of souls, and the restoration of relationships. Especially we remember before you those in need of your healing, we pray for and all others in our hearts. Keep us strong by your grace. Help us to be a community that reflects your purpose and will. Help us to love one another, and by loving each other, to be a source of love to the world.

O God, in the struggle of life.

Be our strength and guide.

Thank you that you hear our prayers and answer them, in your wisdom.

Help us to seek your guidance and serve faithfully in your name.

In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.



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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 forever. Amen.

Passing the peace

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

Offering

Generous God, you have shown us great love.
May we, in the unity of Christ, bring our
diverse gifts and offer them to your service.
Let your Holy Spirit enable and guide us, so
that all that we do may bring glory to your
name. Amen.

Notices

This week is The Week of Prayer for Christian
Unity (see www.ncca.org.au for resources).

In this week we are urged to seek ways for the
Church to be whole and united in the way that
Christ envisaged, and to pray for all within the
community of the Church.

Singing TIS 473; Community of Christ

Blessing

Go now and live as children of light.
**May we together shine your light into the
darkness of this world.**
Help us to be one in your love.
Strengthen our desire to work together for you.

And may you go with the blessing
of the Triune God.
Be restorers of life,
be a blessing to those you meet.
Be people of hope and give thanks in all you do.
We go with the blessing of God. Amen.

Liturgy: Rev. Sandra Houghton
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