



Sunday August 14th, 2022 ***The Fig Tree Worship Resource***

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

By faith we gather,
Recalling those who have
shaped,
encouraged,
equipped,
enabled
us in the way of Jesus Christ.

Many in faith have shown us the light of Christ,
The light of Christ shines among us now.

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

TiS 455 'For all the saints'



Prayer

God of all the saints,
We offer you our thanks and praise
for all you have inspired,
those who have journeyed your way
through good times and difficult ones
and have mentored us on the way.

God of all the saints,
We praise you for the blessings
they have passed on to us.
As we recall parents, wider family, friends,
pastors, priests, lay leaders,
mentors, youth leaders and camp cooks,
those who endured and went the extra mile
that we may know Christ is with us.

We pause to reflect and offer our thanks for
those who have grown our faith in you.

(pause)

As we recall those important to us, we may think
them giants but also be aware they struggled in
faith. As the writer of Hebrews notes, the weight
of sin can cling close. This is why we all need a
cloud of witnesses to encourage us on.

And so we pause again, this time to ponder those
things that weigh us down, the things that hinder
our response to you, loving and restoring God.

(pause)

Friends, remember the cloud of witnesses to
Jesus Christ, those who encourage us on the way
despite all our challenges. Remember that even
as they faced similar challenges, they knew
salvation in the name of Christ, who calls us, lifts
us, and restores us fully in God's name.

Thanks be to God, amen.

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Hebrews 11:29 – 12:2 &
Luke 12:49-56

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

Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton

Over the past few weeks, I have been watching
the *Tour de France* cycling race which started in
Copenhagen and, after 21 stages and almost
3,400 kms, ended in Paris.

At the start there were 176 riders in 22 teams,
but the long race took its toll with 38 riders



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withdrawing over the three weeks. Half the withdrawals were due to Covid infections, but the rest due to injuries as riders crashed out. It is an absolutely gruelling marathon of a race, climbing some very impressive mountains, often in the heat, testing every rider who participates. The winner was the Dane Jonas Vingegaard. He finished almost six hours ahead of the last placed getter, the Australian rider Caleb Ewen. Caleb endured a hell of a race that included two crashes that left him injured and very bruised and sore, but he persisted to the end.

The riders are encouraged on by huge crowds who line the roads, waving flags and banners and cheering them on. This must be particularly important to those riders who are out of contention for any prize, but merely seeking to get to the end of the race for the sake of their teams.

With the Tour de France just ended, and other sporting events in the news, it is an apt time to focus on the reading from the Book of Hebrews as it uses sporting imagery and analogies which fit in well with what we have been witnessing in the Tour de France.

For the writer the book of Hebrews describes the Christian life as a race. It says, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."* Hebrews 12:1

Now, it doesn't appear that it is a competitive race, as it is the finish that is being strived for rather than to beat others to the finish. However, it is an endurance race as we are told that perseverance is required to reach the finish line. The Christian is called to run this race looking to the example of Jesus who has run this race before us.

Clearly, this means that we are to live our lives seeking to emulate the example of Jesus in the way that we live and relate to other people. The

prize for completing the race is not a Yellow jersey or a trophy, but rather something much more precious than that. The prize is eternal life in the presence of Jesus, the one who has opened up the way of salvation for us.

The thing that I find most wonderful about this reading is that it makes very clear that we do not run this race by ourselves, rather we are being cheered on and encouraged by all who have gone before us in faith.

Those cheering us on would include our Christian forebears including all those who nurtured us in faith. It would also include those who nurtured them in their faith, and those who went before them back through the ages.

According to the writer of the Book of Hebrews it goes right back to Abraham and Sarah, who according to the book of Genesis were the first people who stepped out in faith when called by God. They were our forebears in faith and God blessed them with a son of their very old age who became the father of a great nation.

Abraham and Sarah were followed by many other faithful people down through the ages, who are also among those who cheer us on in our Christian faith journey.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews tells us that all these faithful people are praying for us and cheering for us as we seek to live faithfully throughout our lives.

This 'cloud of witnesses' are like the crowds who cheered on the riders in the Tour de France and encouraged them. Helping them to do their best, to endure and to complete the race.

Knowing that there are all these faithful people cheering us on should encourage us and help us understand that what we do and what we believe matters to many people as well as to God. And it should help us especially when we, like Caleb Ewen, are battered and bruised and struggling.



Sunday August 14th, 2022 ***The Fig Tree Worship Resource***

So, let us take courage, and let us rejoice that when we reach the end of that journey and cross the finish line we will be greeted by Jesus who will give us a reward that is much better than any trophy, eternal life. So that we in turn will join that great cloud of witnesses and be encouragers to all who follow on after us in the Christian faith.

Isn't that good news? Thanks be to God.

Singing

TiS 470 'Rejoice in God's saints'

Alt tune: LAUDATE DOMINUM TiS 215

Offering

God of all the saints, we offer these gifts, encouraged by the great cloud of witnesses. Bless this sharing that it becomes a greater blessing, that our living is witness and encouragement to others in your name. Amen.

Notices

Friday August 19th is *World Humanitarian Day*.

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

God of all creation, we've heard of the endurance in faith of others, those who have had grit and determination to follow your way when things have been tough. We know that things are tough for many people right now, things that touch all of your creation deeply.

We pray for a world ravaged by war and conflicts, places where tensions and posturing can further deepen mistrust. We pray for a world that is changing the nature of conflict as technology enables reach in ways previously unknown. May your light shine in dark places. Bless saints who shine your light in places of war and conflict.

We pray for our world impacted by extreme weather events. In Australia we have endured

droughts and bushfire and more recently flooding. Many of our northern neighbours have faced extreme heat and globally records break year upon year. May your light shine in dark places. Bless saints who keep us focussed on action against climate change.

We pray for many people around the world with no buffer against forces acting upon them. Famine, inflation, homelessness and many other difficult situations are worse through global impacts of war, climate and trade wars. May your light shine in dark places. Bless saints who shine your light as they house refugees, volunteer at soup kitchens, and find a bed for those sleeping rough.

We pray for our country as we explore what it means to have a First Nations voice to Parliament. We pray for those who fear misinformation and for those who feel the need to spread rumours or half-truths. We pray for those who may feel alienated from conversation, and for those who cannot bridge differences of opinion. May your light shine in dark places. Bless saints who honour and uphold the voices that need to be heard, and care for those who cannot reconcile the complexity of our nation and the need for justice.

We pray for our church, through changes forced upon us by the pandemic and tensions that remain because of it. We pray for a church that struggles with a changing world. May your light shine in dark places. Bless our prophetic saints, those who find courage and a voice for our times, those who fight against the forces in order for your light to shine.



Sunday August 14th, 2022 ***The Fig Tree Worship Resource***

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.

Singing

TiS 609 'May the mind of Christ my Saviour'

Blessing

Bless you,
those who pray for family and friends,
those who pray earnestly for the world,
those who lend a hand or ask,
'are you ok?'

Bless you,
those who read from the Scriptures
and invite others to read with you,
those who stand with,
and by,
and for
those who need a friend.

Bless you,
those who follow Christ,
no matter how clumsy
or faltering you are.
Bless you!

In all you are, and in all you do,
may you find encouragement
through the great cloud of witnesses
and may you encourage one another
in the light of Christ.

The blessing of God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
be yours now and always. Amen.

Other hymn suggestions

TiS 387 'Christ is alive! Let Christians sing'
TiS 674 'Inspired by love and anger'
TiS 690 'Beauty for brokenness hope for despair'
TiS 749 'Send me Jesus'

Presbytery of Gippsland
Reflection: Rev. Sandra Houghton
Liturgy & Editing:
Rev. Arnie Wierenga
pastoral.ucagipps@gmail.com

