



## Sunday Sept Sunday September 4th, 2022 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

### Today is the UCA's Child Safe Sunday.

We commit ourselves again to making sure that our gathering places are safe for our children and for everyone.

*At the heart of being a community of good news and a loving presence in our neighbourhoods, is a commitment to be safe communities for all. This means we will commit to having appropriate people in leadership, and valuing all people as made in the image of God*

**Rev. Sharon Hollis, UCA President**

### Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Creative Spirit of life,  
we pause as we begin  
listening to the sounds of life around us.  
(pause)

Open our ears to hear your whispers,  
open our hearts to love you more,  
draw us together in this time of worship,  
shape us into your image.

And all the people say: **Amen!**

*Light the candle:*  
The light of Christ shines in the darkness  
and the darkness cannot put it out.

### Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander  
Christian Congress

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and these waters. *(Please include the name of your local traditional owners).* We pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. We confess that, as a church, we have not always been a safe place for our First Nations siblings. We commit ourselves to finding ways of living the covenant locally, walking together, First and Second Peoples, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

### Singing - O breath of life, TiS 409



### Prayer

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.  
**You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.**

You search out my path and my lying down, and  
are acquainted with all my ways.  
**Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD,  
you know it completely.**

You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
**Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.**

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
**I praise you,  
for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.**

My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
**Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.**

In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.

**How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them, they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end -- I am still with you.**

*(This prayer was written by Rev Sharon Hollis,  
UCA President, for UCA Child Safe Sunday 2022)*

God of righteous anger and tender compassion,  
We give you thanks for all who work to keep  
children safe in the Uniting Church:



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For champions of child safety, who ensure those who minister with children do so safely;  
For policy writers, who guide us in safe behaviour and practices.

For those who challenge unsafe practices, courageously making our communities safer  
And all who learn and reflect on safe practices, that all might continue to grow and flourish in safety

God of righteous anger and tender compassion, when we are wearied by the work of safety grant us fresh energy for the task.

When we are frustrated by the many things necessary to be a safe community, help us rejoice in the privilege of welcoming others into our communities.

When we are tempted to take safety short cuts, remind us of the importance of being a community that cares.

God of righteous anger and tender compassion, bind up those damaged by abuse in the life of the church and call us afresh to repentance, restoration and prevention.

May all we do to create safe and welcoming communities so that your good news might be proclaimed with joy, and children might find life and hope in the gospel.  
Amen

*The President's message can be viewed here:*  
<https://vimeo.com/733104222/829f948830>

### ***Passing the peace***

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

### ***Listening***

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Read: *Jeremiah 18:1-11;*

*Luke 14:25-33*

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

### ***Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton***

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Watching a skilled potter at work is mesmerising. The potter makes the process look so simple as they set the wheel spinning, throw a lump of clay into the middle of the spinning base plate, and start shaping the clay with their hands. Before long a beautiful bowl or plate or vase is formed and then cut from the wheel ready to dry before firing.

However, looks can be deceptive. When I travelled to Turkey, we visited a pottery in Cappadocia where one of the potters did a demonstration of how to make bowls and jugs. He made it look absolutely effortless. A volunteer was allowed to have a go at using the potter's wheel, but the potter insisted on him putting on a voluminous apron. The reason for this soon became apparent as when our intrepid volunteer turned on the wheel and attempted to throw a lump of clay onto the wheel. It splattered everywhere and showered him with a spray of clay. The potter helped him have another go, and this time the clay stayed on the wheel, but his attempts to make a bowl were laughable. It was clear that it would take more than a few lessons to master the skill.

Even the skilled potters in this pottery had their share of failures. When they were not satisfied with the results of their work, the potters would cut the clay from their wheel and throw it into a bucket ready for it to be re-worked.

In the story from Jeremiah, God sends the prophet to the local potter's workshop to watch the potter work the clay. Back then the potter's wheel would have been spun using a turntable and flywheel. Ancient civilisations relied on pottery for jugs to carry and store water, wine and oil, for tableware, and much more. So, the skilled potter would have been a valuable member of society.

So, Jeremiah was seeing an age-old process handed down over the generations. But no matter how skillful the craftsman, there will always be mishaps. Then the potter gathers up



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the spent clay and starts the process all over again. Jeremiah saw in the potter's actions a dramatic parable from God. There was an analogy between the way the potter dealt with the misshapen clay object by re-working and re-moulding it to make something good, and the way that God could re-work and re-mould his errant nation of Israel. "Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?"

The nation of Israel has been disobedient and has gone astray worshipping pagan idols, but God does not want to give up on her. God wants to re-shape the rulers and people of Israel into a faithful nation. God offers forgiveness where there is repentance. God is sovereign over Israel, just as the potter is sovereign over the clay, but God wants and longs for the people to come to their senses so that God can make them into a faithful people with a hopeful future in which they will serve God and care for one another.

God, likewise, wants to watch over us closely like the potter watches over the clay, and God wants to shape us and guide us. God wants to re-direct us when we go astray and lead us back onto the right path. God wants to lead us into obedience, shape us for service, and give us hope.

There is a complex interaction between God, the Creator but also the one who can re-create; and God's people who are like clay in God's hands, but also so much more. God made us to be able to do great things, but God cannot make us use our gifts or make us make the right choices. God cannot direct our lives, or will us to go on a new path, or undertake a new purpose unless we are willing to be directed.

We are neither robots or automatons nor closed circuits. The shape of our character is not fixed, it can change. We can be shaped and formed by education, upbringing, religious instruction, examples and mentors. We can be deformed through evil, corruption, abuse and unrestrained ambition. We are susceptible to influence, good and bad. We have the capacity to do much that is good. In our relationship with God, we exercise free will. We decide whether we will heed God's

guidance or reject it. We can decide our own priorities and choices or be guided by God in our priorities and choices.

May we be open to God moulding us and guiding us into paths of faithfulness, that we may truly use the gifts and abilities that God has given us to serve God and others. Amen.

*(You may want to give people a chance to read through the following prayer and sit with it in silence for a few minutes before inviting them to read it together as they are able.)*

### A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition

*I am no longer my own, but yours,  
put me to what you will,  
surround me with whom you will.*

*Put me to doing, put me to struggling.  
Shape me to work eagerly for you  
or to rest calmly for you.  
Let me be celebrated for you  
or humbled for you.*

*Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely surrender all of me  
to your pleasure and purpose.*

*And now, O Glorious and blessed God,  
One in three, Three in One,  
You are mine and I am yours. So be it.*

*And the covenant  
which I have made on earth,  
let it hold in the heavens. Amen.*

### Singing - Master speak, TiS 597



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### **Offering**

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Bless these gifts we bring; money, food, time and our lives. Take them as the potter takes the clay and shape them into vessels of blessing, taking your love to the world where it is most needed, in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Notices**

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#### **A safe church is who we are called to be**

**Safeguarding** is the approach we take to ensure the wellbeing of children and young people, so they flourish and thrive into the people God calls them to be.

**Safeguarding** is about more than "safety", which is about preventing risk and harm. It is about working with them so they feel safe, supported, and their sense of wellbeing enables them to thrive.

**God** calls us to safeguard children and young people. **Our Church** expects us to safeguard children and young people. **The law** requires everyone over the age of 18 to safeguard children and young people, as individuals, groups and as an organisation.

#### **Speak up**

##### **if you see, hear or feel something of concern**

- UCA National Child Safe Training
- Safe Church Contacts and Safe Church Leads in your congregation, presbytery and synod
- National Safe Church Unit for expertise, advice and support
- Transparency and openness is key – there is no wrong door, you do not need to provide evidence of make a judgement about your concern.

**contact: [www.safechurch.uca.org.au](http://www.safechurch.uca.org.au)**

**email: [info@safechurch.uca.org.au](mailto:info@safechurch.uca.org.au)**

**September 8th** is RUOK? Day

<https://www.ruok.org.au/join-r-u-ok-day>

and also International Literacy Day

<https://events.unesco.org/event?id=2036446720&lang=1033>

**September 10th** is World Suicide Prevention Day

<https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/event/world-suicide-prevention-day/>

### **Responding:**

#### **Prayers for World & Community**

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*Let everyone shape these prayers.*

*Offer each person, younger and older, a piece of modelling clay and invite them to create a shape that represents a prayer that they bring for others. Have music playing. Be generous with the time and invite them to share as they bring what they have shaped to place around the Christ candle. You could use a simple call and response after each person:*

Creative Spirit of God

**Hear our prayer**

as we pray together in our heart language:

#### **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.

#### **Singing - Jesus put this song TiS 670**

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### **Blessing**

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Creative God, Holy one, Holy Three. Send us out to be your loving presence in our lives and in our neighbourhood. Shape us and remake us until we resemble your image, as vessels of your peace.

Siblings in love, go knowing that you are beloved children of God. May Jesus walk beside you and the Spirit be your guide, **in the name of Christ, Amen.**

*Reflection: Rev. Sandra Houghton,*

*Liturgy & Editor:*

*Rev. Jennie Gordon*

*Presbytery of Gippsland*

[pastoral.ucaqipps@gmail.com](mailto:pastoral.ucaqipps@gmail.com)



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