



Sunday November 13th, 2022 **The Fig Tree Worship Resource**

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Before we call God answers.
Why do we gather, why are we here?
**Here with the gathered community,
we encounter God.**

'In you God delights, in you God rejoices!'
Before we call, God answers.

God forgets what went before
and delights in creating anew.
Come and be renewed and refreshed.

*We light the candle, remembering the light of
Christ shines among us.*

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

Love divine, all loves excelling (TiS 217)



Prayer

Do not be weary in doing what is right.
Our hearts long to follow you more nearly, to be
in right relationship with you and each other.

But God, we confess that sometimes we are tired,
we are distracted by the things which do not
matter. We imitate and absorb the negative and
forget to focus on what brings renewed life. We
find it hard to endure because we have forgotten
your promises. Do not be angry with us, but
comfort us and lead us into new life.

Beloved of God,
Trust and be not afraid, for in God you will find
your strength and your salvation.
Proclaim the goodness of God with great joy.
You are forgiven and set free.

And we will say on that day:
**"Give thanks to the LORD;
call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.
Sing praises to the LORD,
for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst
is the Holy One of Israel."** *(Isaiah 12:4-6)*

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 & Luke 21:1-19
For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word:
Thanks be to God.

Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton

I have a T-shirt that's over thirty years old, and I just can't throw it away. It's a souvenir from a place that no longer exists, as I purchased it on the 107th floor of the World Trade Centre number 2 building in New York.

If anyone had tried to tell me on that day in 1989, as I took in the amazing views of Manhattan and beyond, that that vast impressive building would be utterly destroyed in just over decade, I would have thought them crazy. But as we know, both towers of the World Trade Centre are gone, destroyed in an act of terrorism.

So, when I read that passage in Luke's Gospel where Jesus sits with the disciples in that vast and splendid temple in Jerusalem and tells them that



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it will utterly be destroyed, I can feel for their incredulousness. It was beyond their comprehension. After all, the Temple was huge, hewn out of massive blocks of stone. How could it possibly be destroyed?

The disciples were not to know that some of their fellow Jews would revolt against their Roman oppressors in 70 CE. This revolt was brutally crushed after a siege. The Roman army razed Jerusalem to the ground, including the temple.

All that remained of that once marvellous Temple were some of the foundations that have become a special place of prayer for Jews - the Wailing Wall. There, amongst other prayers, they lament the loss of their temple and pray for the Messiah to come. That the Temple would be destroyed would have been shocking to those who were gathered with Jesus.

But some of them may well have remembered that this was not the first Temple. The earlier temple that Solomon built had been destroyed. Perhaps it might be possible that it could happen again. They might have been aware of apocalyptic teachings about the end time, the judgement time that was to come, as this had been part of the Jewish tradition for a long time. And it had always been believed by many that the coming of the Messiah would signal the beginning of that end time. Part of that apocalyptic teaching had been portents of war and destruction.

Nonetheless, all of those gathered there that day would have been aghast at what Jesus said, especially as they believed that the Temple was the place where God dwelt on earth. To lose the Temple was akin to losing God's presence. How could they survive such a catastrophe?

Jesus though is clear to point out that God (and he) will still be with them, even in times of calamity and war, and even in the face of the loss of the Temple. But he does not gloss over the suffering, including horrendous persecution, that his followers will face.

He urges them to avoid getting caught up in trying to predict when these things would happen. He urges them not to focus their lives on preparing for the end times, nor in getting caught up in fanaticism. He urges them to get on with living faithfully and to trust that he will be with them. He promises that he will strengthen and guide them through their ordeals, even giving them the words they will need for their defence.

We know that what Jesus predicted did happen. There was incredible persecution, and there were revolts, and Jerusalem was destroyed, but out of its ashes the Church was born and spread. The faithful remnant kept the faith just as Jesus had urged them to do. They were never completely crushed, but instead took their faith with them as they scattered across the known world and founded churches in many new places.

Because the predictions about the destruction of the Temple were often tied closely to predictions about the 'end times', many of these early Christians believed that the end of the world was very close. They thought that Jesus would soon return for them and hence they paid little attention to material things. They thought, why work when there's no tomorrow to provide for?

The church community at Thessalonica that Paul writes to in today's Epistle reading includes some of these non-workers. But Paul is scathing of them. He urges the church community to stop feeding them because their actions are unfair on their fellow Christians and destructive of community life. They are not living according to the great command to love God and love one's neighbour as oneself. If they loved neighbour, they would be working and doing their share.

Paul, like Jesus earlier on, urges them to get on with living faithfully in the now. Doing what is necessary to sustain life and family and community. Not focusing on the end times, but rather on living faithfully from day to day.

It is what we are called to do too. To live faithfully in the here and now. We live in



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uncertain times. Many have suggested because of the many wars and catastrophic events that have taken place over recent years that these are the 'end times'. But only God knows when the end times will be.

What we can be confident about is that the promises that Jesus made to that group gathered with him in the Temple apply to us as well as to them. We will never be left to our own devices. God remains with us. And Jesus will strengthen and guide us no matter what the situation, as long as we are willing to trust him.

Sometimes this may be exceedingly hard. We may be facing an uncertain future or dealing with immense losses or struggling in our personal or business relationships, but, no matter what the situation, we are not alone.

We are called to keep moving forward into the future God has given us, faithfully. Amen.

Singing

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us (TIS 580)

Offering¹

Christ of the new covenant,
give us the happiness to share,
with full measure, pressed down,
shaken together and running over,
all that you give us; In the name of Christ AMEN

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community²

*For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating,
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy
and its people as a delight.*

¹ from *Uniting in Worship 2*

² Italicised text is from Isaiah 15: 17-25 (NRSV updated)

*I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it
or the cry of distress.*

No more distress, no more weeping.

We hear the words of old, your promise of renewal. Sometimes they feel far off as we witness pain and suffering and our hearts feel worn out. We pray for the people around us this day, those sitting beside us, those we encountered earlier today. Those on our town corners, serving in our shops and serving our communities.

No more distress, no more weeping.

*No more shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days
or an old person who does not live out a
lifetime,
for one who dies at a hundred years will be
considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be
considered accursed.*

This day there are people we care about who are sick, struggling with issues around ageing and loss of independence. We long for the time when children and old people will live full and long lives. When all people are given dignity and voice. We pray for the hungry, the sad and grieving..

No more distress, no more weeping.

*They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat,
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my
people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of
their hands.
They shall not labour in vain
or bear children for calamity,
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—
and their descendants as well.*



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We pray for victims of injustice, those who are betrayed, targeted and persecuted. We hear horror stories from war zones and internment camps and from prisons and from the streets.

No more distress, no more weeping.

*Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the LORD.*

We hear of floods and fires. We hear of earthquakes, famines and plagues and we wonder how there can ever be a time where there is no more distress, no more weeping, no more tears. Even creation is crying and groaning under the weight of exploitation.

You will rejoice in your people and delight in them. Your promises are sure and true.

Bring your reign of peace, and let it begin with 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.

Singing

Loving Spirit, Loving Spirit (TiS 417)

Closing Prayer & Blessing³

Great *Bunji* God⁴,
you sent your Son Jesus
to be our Saviour, our Guide and our Friend.
At the dawn of this new day
we pray for strength to follow in his steps,
and to be true witnesses for him
among our people who love the great earth
mother,
your gift to them from the dreamtime.
We pray for all people of all countries,
that they may become one great family
with Jesus as Saviour.
As we come to the evening of this day,
may we go to our rest in the quiet hours of the
night
knowing that, in spite of our human weaknesses,
we have truly walked with Jesus.
This prayer we offer in the name of Jesus,
our Good Friend. *Aralba*.

*Revd Lazarus Lamilami, 1910-1977,
first UCA ordained Aboriginal minister*

The blessing of the Holy Trinity of love
be upon you:
God, who is love, fill your hearts.
Christ Jesus, who is the new life,
inspire your hopes.
The Holy Spirit, who is life giver,
Spur you to deeds of compassion.

Other Song Suggestions

Great is your faithfulness (TiS 154)
Be still my soul (TiS 123)
Forth in thy name O Lord I go (TiS 571)
We are marching (TiS 666)

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³ from *Uniting in Worship 2*

⁴ *Bunji* is an Aboriginal word for Father. *Aralba* means: I have spoken from my heart.