



Advent 3 - Sunday December 11th, 2022

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship

Isaiah 35:1-2

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.

As we worship you today,
God of the wilderness and dry land,
the rivers and flood plains,
the mountains and oceans,

**let our voices join
with the rejoicing of all things.
Let our hearts be glad
in anticipation of your coming.
Fill us with your Spirit of life,
Amen.**

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 - Tell out my soul TiS 161

or My soul gives glory to my God TiS 172 - this version of the Magnificat has more inclusive words. Many tunes - try AMAZING GRACE



Prayer

ADVENT WREATH 3 candles are lit

On this third Sunday of Advent
we light three candles.
The third candle reminds us
of the promise of joy in Jesus' coming.

**All: We wait for you, Jesus Christ.
You strengthen weak hands
and make firm the feeble.
We see the joy of your promise before us.**

Singing - Come, let's walk

based on Isaiah 2:5

words: Jennie Gordon © 2019

tune: Twinkle, twinkle, little star

**Come, let's walk the path of light
through the darkness of the night.
Now the lost don't walk alone,
hungry ones are welcomed home.
Joy in what we do and say,
joy between us on the way.**

In gratitude we offer our prayers:

All creation celebrates you,
Holy community of joy.
The surging of surf, the whistling of wind,
the warbling of magpie and the croak of frog,
all lend their notes
to the symphony of song
each one an instrument of praise.

We add our sounds to the score,
from the laboured breath of the dying,
to the insistent cries of a baby,
we praise you for life as we know it,
**All: for the mighty one-in-three
has done great things for me,
and Holy is their name.**
(pause)

You knew us before we were born
and are alongside, within and around,
each day, each step, each moment
we praise you for your constant presence
**All: for the mighty one-in-three
has done great things for me,
and Holy is their name.**
(pause)

You birth new possibilities in us,
open our eyes to unimaginable wonder,
make our bodies dance with delight,
and fill us with hope and peace
**All: for the mighty one-in-three
has done great things for me,
and Holy is their name.**
(pause)

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Holy community of joy, you make us one,
drawing us into your dynamic embrace,
connecting us with each other and with you,

we spend a few minutes in quiet reflection
opening our eyes, our ears and our hearts
to your joyful Spirit amongst us.

(longer pause)

Holy Community of joy,
we confess that
we sometimes tell ourselves
that we are not worthy of your love,
we close ourselves to your presence
and refuse your embrace.

Forgive us and open us to life.

Holy Community of joy,
we confess that
we judge, accuse and dismiss each other,
with harmful words and actions
and we do the same to strangers,
whose stories we can't know or understand.

Forgive us and open us to life.

Holy Community of joy,
we confess that
in all the struggles of the world,
we can forget your constant presence.
We can stop listening for noises of joy.
We can stop speaking up for the oppressed.
We can withdraw from your dance of delight
that invites us into connection
and communion.

Forgive us and open us to life.

And yet, you assure us
that hope will rise up,
that even the stones will shout,
that there is always time to learn, to turn
and to turn around again,
and you tell us that our sins are forgiven.

**All: Thanks be to God,
for the mighty One-in-three
has done great things for me,
and Holy is their name.**

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Isaiah 35:1-10

Luke 1:46b-55 (responsively)

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
**for he has looked with favour
on the lowliness of his servant.**

Surely, from now on
all generations will call me blessed;
**for the Mighty One
has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.**

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
**He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud
in the thoughts of their hearts.**

He has brought down the powerful from their
thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
**he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.**

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
**according to the promise he made
to our ancestors, to Abraham
and to his descendants forever."**

Read: Matthew 11: 2-11

For these words of faith,
and for Jesus the Living Word,
thanks be to God, Amen.



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Reflecting - Rev. Deacon Marian Bisset

The readings for today are troubling when taken at the literal level. The deaf shall hear, the blind shall see, the lame shall walk as the way to fullness of life with God. This is a deeply disturbing thinking, if not nuanced and read in a fuller context. Do we reflect on what it means to live with a disability, beautiful and fully in God's image and not to be changed? God uses people living with a disability to demonstrate the extent of God's all-encompassing love and redemption.

Moses had a speech impediment which was the excuse to not do what God wanted. God didn't get rid of the speech impediment rather told Moses to do what God asked him to do. Paul had a thorn in his side, yet when Paul asked God to heal him, God responded that God's grace is sufficient, and God's power is made full through weakness or vulnerability. We can all do well to take this on board when we read the words today.

I attended the Bush Chaplain Conference for Frontier Services in Sydney recently and it seems to me this is exactly what we Bush Chaplains strive to do; to be concerned about the oppressed, the hungry, the homeless, or those who live with disability. As the psalmist and Jesus made clear it is the responsibility for all to see the vulnerable, to notice the ones whose heads are bowed down with life, or those who occupy youth detention centres, prisons or refugees being held captive in our system.

How might we as the privileged reach into those spaces and break down barriers or smash the walls built to divide? We can take heart in knowing God watches over the oppressed. But, and there is always a but, watching over the oppressed takes shape as "you protect strangers; you sustain orphans and the bereaved, but you thwart the way of the corrupt" (Ps. 146:9). Double-edged words: God protects those who bring a vulnerable fullness of life but has little time for those who don't. That puts the ball fairly and squarely into our court; we are the ones who need to action compassion, advocacy and care.

Perhaps we are given a mandate to examine the extent to which disabled people, and

minoritised people, are happy in our churches. Are they visible in our churches? I wonder whether they would be able to say honestly, they feel valued and blessed in our churches and that we do everything we can to mitigate barriers which further diminish the fullness of God's image?

We celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent today, traditionally set aside as Gaudete Sunday, to rejoice as we wait. To rejoice in the faith we have that God is with us and to rejoice that we have the mandate to stand up to the injustices around us, to the oppression within our structure. The privilege and comfort many of us experience comes with a flip side, an expectation from God and from others we will take action to not be the corrupt who are thwarted, as the psalmist said.

For many people Christmas is no different from any other time of the year, for others it is a time of recurring and deep grief or trauma, for others a celebration of new life and relationships and for others somewhere in between. God reminds us that there is no aspect of life, no geographical region and no human condition which is apart from God.

They will enter Zion shouting for joy,
with everlasting joy on their faces;
joy and gladness will go with them,
and sorrow and lament will flee away.

Singing - Inspired by love and anger TiS 674

or Isaiah the prophet has written of old... TiS 663

Offering

We bring our gifts to you, loving one who comes amongst us. May they be used to spread hope, peace and joy. We bring ourselves also, as people with privilege and power, so that you can use us to break down the barriers and smash the dividing walls put in place to exclude, isolate and diminish people. Use these gifts and use us according to your will, in Jesus' name, **Amen**.

Notices

Dec 3rd was the *International Day of People with Disability*. Did you know that around one in six people, or 4.4 million Australians, have disability.

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Not all disability is the same, and some disabilities are invisible. By joining the conversation and listening to the stories and lived experiences of people with disability, we can challenge our own perceptions about disability and help make positive changes in the community.

<https://www.idpwd.com.au/events/event-planning-kits/>

Many years ago, UCA congregations were asked to ensure that church buildings and manses had good access and amenities for people who may use mobility aids such as wheelchairs, crutches and walkers. Have you checked to make sure that these still comply? How accessible is your church for everyone, both outside and inside? If you're in Gippsland, the Property Committee can help: contact Lindsay Oates - lindsayo@dcsi.net.au

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

Loving God, Holy Community of joy, as we await the celebration of your coming, we hold before you the people and places in the world that need your blessings of hope, peace and joy:

We bring to mind countries at war, suffering the loss of lives and livelihoods through the darkness of destruction in the pursuit of power.

Hear us, **Hear our prayer**

We bring to mind communities ravaged by natural disasters, under threat from climate change and rocked by division, violence and hate.

Hear us, **Hear our prayer**

We bring to mind people who are suffering the effects of isolation and dispossession, feeling marginalised, abused and forgotten. For family and friends, whose names and situations we know, and for others whose stories we have yet to hear.

Hear us, **Hear our prayer**

Reach out your loving arms to transform the pain of the world, Holy Community of joy. Find hope where it is lost. Establish peace where it has been destroyed. Bring joy, even in the most difficult of circumstances, and let your love be born, vulnerable and fragile, miraculous and unmeasured for the sake of the world, as we pray together in the language of our hearts:

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 - O for a thousand tongues TiS 210

or: On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry TiS 270

Blessing

Isaiah 35:10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Go knowing that you are loved, by the Source of all joy, and live as if you believe it.
May the blessing of the Holy, One-in-three, Three-in-one, be upon you and remain with you, now and always, Amen.

Blessing Song: You shall go out with joy TiS 755

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