



## Sunday January 15th, 2023 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

### Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

*Listen to me, O coastlands,  
pay attention, you peoples from far away!  
The LORD called me before I was born,  
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.  
(Isaiah 49:1)*

Like the prophet we are  
known and named by God.  
We pay attention from coastlands to far away  
to God revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

### 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 210

#### O for a thousand tongues to sing

OR TiS 419 Like the murmur of the dove's song



### Prayer

Creator God,  
We offer our praise as we join with thousands of  
tongues to sing of your grace and the way you  
give us voice to hope, love and your light.

We give thanks for the new year. As it begins,  
many have made resolutions or shared covenant  
commitments about who we are as followers of  
Jesus. The apostle Paul reminds us of our call to  
*be saints.*

But as new year's resolutions are broken, as we  
struggle to live into the vision of your covenant  
with us, we offer you the reality of our struggles.

Open up spaces of grace as we remember that  
you call us, name us and invite us into life through  
Jesus Christ.

*We keep a time of silence*

From Psalm 40:

*I waited patiently for the Lord;  
he inclined to me and heard my cry.  
He drew me up from the desolate pit,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.  
He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God.*

We will sing, sing a new song.  
We will sing, sing a new song.  
**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

### Singing - TiS 560

#### All my hope on God is founded

OR TiS 741 O Lord hear my prayer

### Passing the peace

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

### Listening

Read: Isaiah 49:1-7 &  
John 1:29-42

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

### Reflecting - Rev. Jennie Gordon

"Listen to me, O coastlands" says the passage  
from Isaiah and suddenly I'm listening in a  
different way. Images of the inter-tidal zone of  
transition and transformation drift into my mind,



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the liminal space of the shoreline, sometimes ocean, sometimes soft sandy land. The coastlands, shifting border between the place that's safe to stand and the dragons of the deep. This is an edge-place of life and death and possibility, always changing.

The writer of this part of Isaiah is speaking into the situation in Jerusalem, Zion, after the first wave of exiles have returned from Babylon around 538 BCE. They've returned to a wretched reality, not at all what they had expected. They are on the borderline between hope and despair and are called into remembering the presence and promise of their God, the one God, who formed them: *"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."* To the end of the earth! Much of this part of the book of Isaiah uses words from older manuscripts and shapes them with beauty, resonance and alliteration, using masculine and feminine images for God, bringing the poetry of ancient hope into the harsh and present reality for a community in the borderland of anguish and suffering.

There's an echo of this proclamation to a suffering people longing for restoration in John the Baptist's declaration about Jesus, in the reading from the gospel of John; *"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* One translation uses the word 'cosmos' instead of 'world', spanning space, breaking the boundary between earth and heaven, drawing us all into a cosmic collective of divine life and light. Here, in John's gospel, we are in a liminal space, an edge place of possibility, a transition zone, as the Baptiser points to Jesus and says to his followers, 'that's him, he's the one'.

In this story of the call of the disciples, they leave their teacher not their nets, and move from John to Jesus. This is orchestrated and directed by John, deliberate and decisive, a message for the first community of listeners. Jesus asks what they are looking for and they answer with a question,

"Where are you staying?". Where do you abide? The inference from the disciple's question is this; we want to be with you. In this time of transition Jesus sees them for who they are, and who they will become. You are Simon. You will be changed and renewed. You will be Peter.

And here we are. The end of the earth has never seemed more real, creatures and habitats are on the verge of desolation, people suffer and struggle in the inter-tidal zone of life and death as the wheels of greed and power grind on. The church as we know it, is a refuge for some and a disappointment for others. As followers of Jesus, how can we inhabit this borderland space with hope? Can we imagine that Jesus sees us for who we are, and can we believe in the promise of who we might become? Will we abide with the Spirit of light and life on the edges of unknowing?

*You pull us out of the boggy bed of the dead and set us on solid ground.*

*You put a new song in our mouth and give us an open ear. (alt Ps 40)*

Listen to me, O coastlands,  
and all who inhabit the  
hard spaces of changing times,  
on the edge of despair,  
disappointment or danger.  
You are not alone, but known and loved  
and are being renewed, reclaimed and  
renamed.

### ***Singing - Coastlands***

*tune: AU CLAIR DE LA LUNE 65.65D (TIS 236)*

Listen to me, coastlands,  
where the waters roar  
and the land, contested,  
shrinking from the shore,  
you are not alone,  
but seen and loved and known,  
treasured in this space:  
the exhale of God's grace.



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Listen to me, nations,  
banished from the land,  
words and ways demolished  
by colonial hand,  
you are not alone,  
but seen and loved and known,  
treasured in this space:  
the exhale of God's grace.

Listen to me, creatures,  
fighting to endure  
habitat destruction,  
future insecure,  
you are not alone,  
but seen and loved and known,  
treasured in this space:  
the exhale of God's grace.

Listen to me, churches,  
living in the past,  
clinging to convention,  
holding on so fast,  
you are not alone,  
but seen and loved and known,  
treasured in this space:  
the exhale of God's grace.

Listen to me, people,  
all who long for light,  
struggling in the darkness,  
waiting through the night,  
you are not alone,  
but seen and loved and known,  
treasured in this space:  
the exhale of God's grace.

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### ***Offering***

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God of new songs and new beginnings, bless what we have shared that it may bring light and hope in your name. May we bring your light and hope through the whole of our being. Amen.

### ***Responding:***

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

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For a contested world of coastlines and borders, we pray, God of grace.

For a world where many are displaced, often with no hope of returning to kith and kin, we pray, God of grace.

For a world of flora and fauna under extreme threat, we pray, God of grace.

For our churches bewildered at loss of place in the world, we pray, God of grace.

For all people, those who long for light, those who struggle, those who wait, those who are alone, we pray, God of grace.

We pray for our world, for her creatures, for the web of creation - that all will be seen and loved and known, treasured in the exhale of your grace.

We pray for ourselves, that we too will find life in the exhale of your grace. As we pray again with the language you give us, the language of our hearts:

### ***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.



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**Singing - TiS 242**

***I danced in the morning***

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OR TiS 417 Loving Spirit

***Blessing***

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As we breathe in and out, we remember:  
we are not alone.

As we breathe in and out, we recall:  
we are seen and loved and known.

As we breathe in and out, we celebrate:  
we live in the exhale of God's grace.

Go to bless and be blessed,  
Go with the breath and life  
of God that enlivens your very being.

Be blessed and bless  
in the name of the  
Creator,  
Redeemer and  
Sustainer. Amen.

*Optional Benediction Song:*  
*TiS 747 The Lord is my light*

*Liturgy: Rev. Arnie Wierenga*  
*Reflection: Rev. Jennie Gordon*  
*Song: 'Coastlands'*  
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