



Sunday January 22nd, 2023 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Please note:

The observance of a Day of Mourning on the Sunday before 26 January arises from a request from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) which was endorsed by the 15th Assembly in 2018. We have chosen to remain with the RCL readings and themes for this week and have used the Acknowledgement of Country and Prayers of the People for the Day of Mourning from the from the UCA Assembly website: <https://uniting.church/dayofmourning/>

We encourage congregations to explore the worship ideas and resources provided by the Assembly, and incorporate them into worship services either today or around the date of 26 January.

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Isaiah 9:2 *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.*

(light the Christ candle)

Glorious God,
One in three, Three in One,
shine your light on us,
turn your face towards us,
as we gather to worship you.

**May your radiance fill us,
your love drench us,
and your call overwhelm us,
in this time of worship,**

so that we can follow Jesus,
taking the light of your love
into the dance of our lives,
sharing your loving-kindness,
calling for truth and justice,
each night and each day,
And all the people say: **Amen.**

Acknowledging

https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Day-of-Mourning-2023_finalmin.pdf



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

Today, as we gather to worship, we acknowledge the _____ peoples, the first inhabitants of this place from time beyond remembering.

We acknowledge that through this land, God nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples.

We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.

We acknowledge that the First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers;
the Spirit was already in the land, revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony.

We acknowledge that the same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways; **and so we rejoice in the reconciling purposes of God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.**

Singing - Gather us in, TiS 474

or God of grace and God of glory TiS 611



Prayer

With sung response TiS 16: Do not be afraid

With grateful hearts we come to praise you,
God of light and life.



Sunday January 22nd, 2023 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Your Spirit sings symphonies in the sunrise
and whispers by the light of the moon.
You breathe in and out
and the tides ply their trade,
inhale, exhale, pulsing, unceasing,
murmuring with the birds,
swirling with the sea creatures,
buzzing with life.

God of light and life, we praise you.

Your light shines into our deepest darkness,
and will never flicker, fade or burn out.
Your face, familiar and strange
turns to us when we most need to see you,
and loves us
and calls us for who we are
and who we might become.

God of light and life, we praise you.

And yet, fear frequently finds us,
grief shatters our hearts and hopes,
unbelief threatens to send us away,
greed and power are hard to resist,
and hard times fall heavy.

Singing:

*Do not be afraid I am with you,
I have called you by your name, you are mine
I have called you by your name, you are mine.*

In the quiet, as individuals
and as a community of faith, and a nation,
we bring those things
words, actions, thoughts or deeds,
that keep us from living in the light,
dark regrets, unforgettable failures,
losses that close us down and shake our faith:

(time of quiet)

Singing:

*Do not be afraid I am with you,
I have called you by your name, you are mine
I have called you by your name, you are mine.*

Siblings in Christ, know this:
You are called, loved and forgiven.
Live as if you believe this.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

Passing the peace

With this assurance,
may the peace of God dwell with you:
and also with you.

Listening

Read: Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

Matthew 4: 12-23

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

Reflecting - Rev Arnie Wierenga

If Jesus were inclined to a more conventional start to his public ministry, it's likely he would have held back on this business of calling disciples. To reach out and ask people to follow you was a bit demeaning. Back in the day if you aspired to be a successful Rabbi, you were expected to wow the people with your greatness. Preach it, proclaim it, be wonderful, and they will come. Wait for them to clamour for your attention, to beg to be your disciples.

Jesus is anything but conventional. But as we hear him quote the old text from Isaiah and refer to the people who were in darkness seeing a great light, we see he is clearly focussed and aware of what he's doing.

And what he's doing is astonishing.

We find him walking by the Sea of Galilee, a place referred to as Galilee of the Gentiles. If his reaching out were controversial, his location is sure to cause further concern. It's the most unlikely of places for a respected teacher to begin. It is a place despised by ordinary Jews as being a hotch-potch of misfits and foreigners. Their religious practices were mixed, and all over the place. They didn't play nicely by the rules. They weren't like 'us', they weren't devout Jews.



Sunday January 22nd, 2023

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

But here is Jesus. This is the place he starts. And what he does is reach out to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew; and following that he does the same with James and his brother John. As they have been sought out and found, they 'immediately' leave their work and follow him.

Matthew's has the establishment in his sights. This gospel is intended to be heard by good religious people, folk with a good grounding in Jewish religious life, those active in the synagogues, those well versed in good Rabbinical teaching. They are like our good and respectable church-goers, grounded in the Scriptures and committed to 'right ways'.

But Matthew comes with a caution for any who hope or think they have it all together. Jesus will shock you and challenge what you know and believe and how you behave. That challenge is just as much for us in the established Christian church.

Those who might feel as though they are light-bearers, such as the religious leaders, are shown up in their desire for power and control as mediators of God's word. And those who are on the edges, those who might be overlooked, ordinary or just plain struggling with everyday life, find that they are sought out in unexpected and inexplicable ways.

The gospel presents us with a paradox. The more we believe we have and hold the light, the less likely we are to be open to our need for the light. Those who do not expect to be lifted from the darkness are the very ones who come to see the great light. What we see here and in other parts of Matthew's gospel is that Jesus keeps seeking us and reaching out to save those who are lost. In fact Jesus is found in the most unlikely of places. Not just in Galilee of the Gentiles, but in prison, among the sickbeds, among those who are destitute, among those who are foreigners without a home. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

If we are truly honest with ourselves, no matter how hard or how earnest our endeavour, we continue to stumble. Which is why this moment from Matthew's gospel brings a word of life to us. While we stumble, Jesus reaches out to us. Jesus seeks us and calls us to follow. And in this loving action in God's name, we are found, if we allow the light to shine in.

As we approach another contested January 26 and consider the Uniting Church encouragement to see today as a *Day of Mourning*, where is Jesus to be seen calling those in darkness to see the great light?

Jesus inhabits the most unlikely of places and reaches out to seek and save the lost until we are found. This is good news! I wonder what that might look like within our families, villages and churches and country?

Singing - Jesus calls us TiS 589

Offering

Abundantly extravagant God, you give us the light of life, so that we might share it with others. Bless the gifts we bring, make them like light in the darkness, hope amidst fear, love amongst apathy. Let these gifts and our lives radiate with your loving-kindness, in the name of Jesus, who calls us into your community of grace, Amen.

Notices

Since 2019 the Uniting Church has marked a Day of Mourning to reflect on the dispossession of Australia's First Peoples and the ongoing injustices faced by First Nations people in this land. For those of us who are Second Peoples from many lands, we lament that we were and remain complicit.

Have you heard about Living the Covenant Locally? From the website: <https://uniting.church/livingthecovenantlocally/> It's a grassroots movement, made up of congregations, faith communities, schools and agencies, who are growing in understanding, encouraging others, connecting with UAICC and/or other First Nations Peoples locally and



Sunday January 22nd, 2023 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

who then are equipped to take action, Walking Together as First and Second Peoples, in binding covenant relationship.

The Walking Together as First and Second Peoples Circle invites you to explore listed resources for study, worship, advocacy and more.

Your community is asked to register and commit to undertake study and engage in one or more of the ways suggested - Listen and Learn (Introductory Resources), Going Deeper (Bible and Theological Resources) and Action (Liturgy, Advocacy, Partnering).

We ask you to encourage other communities to register for a study and help us grow this grass roots movement, committed to deepening relationship as you Live the Covenant Locally.

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Day-of-Mourning-2023_finalmin.pdf

God of all people, life and lands,

Give us the courage to accept the realities of our history so that we may build a better future for our nation.

Teach us to respect all cultures.
Teach us to care for our land and waters.
Help us to share justly the resources of this land.

Help us to bring about spiritual and social change to improve the quality of life for all peoples in our communities, especially the disadvantaged.

Help all young people to find true dignity and self-esteem by your Spirit.

May your power and love be the foundations on which we walk together as First and Second Peoples, and build our families, our communities and our nation.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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 - Be thou my vision TiS 547

or Filled with the Spirit's power - TiS 411

Blessing

Glorious God,
One in three, Three in One,
filled with your radiance
drenched in your love
overwhelmed again by your call on our lives
we leave this time of worship,

**so that we can follow Jesus,
taking the light of your love
into the dance of our lives,
sharing your loving-kindness,
calling for truth and justice,
each night and each day,**

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.

Go now and walk in the light.
and may the blessing of God,
Source, Son and Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.

And all the people say: Amen.

Liturgy & Editor: Rev. Jennie Gordon
Reflection: Rev. Arnie Wierenga
Presbytery of Gippsland
pastoral.ucagipps@gmail.com



The Fig Tree Worship Resource comes to you from the Presbytery of Gippsland, Uniting Church in Australia with blessings and permission to use the content in worship services with acknowledgement.