



Sunday February 5th, 2023 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Shout for all you are worth,
raise your voice like a trumpet!

**Break the chains of injustice,
Share your bread, shelter the homeless,
Attend to your own needs.**

God will guide and strengthen you
to be the Repairer of Broken Walls. (Ps. 58)

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 668

Touch the earth lightly vv 1&2

OR TIS 418 She sits like a bird

OR Tis 474 Here in this place new light is streaming

Prayer



God of our ancestors,
you have led your people,
Protecting us with your power
And sheltering us in your care⁺

We praise and adore you.

You are generous to those who call on you,
Bringing salvation to all
who believe and confess your name.

We praise and adore you.

Living God,

Remain with us today.

Fill us with your Spirit

that we may dwell in Christ.

We praise and adore you. Amen.

Singing - Tis 668

Touch the earth lightly vv 3&4

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Isaiah 58: 1-9a &

Matthew 5: 13-20

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

Reflecting - Rev. Arnie Wierenga

Many Christians describe Matthew 5 as a favourite passage.

You are the salt of the earth

You are the light of the world.

They are truly beautiful, positive and uplifting words. They come from what we recognise as Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount'. But they are not light in content. They provide us with great challenge.

What does it really mean to be salt or light? How do we understand Jesus' warning - salt that has lost its taste is trampled underfoot. Lift up the light, don't hide it ...

The sermon on the mount is precious but difficult. Jesus ups the expectations of what it means to follow, to love God, to bear the light. 'You have heard it said ... but I say'; bringing greater challenge to be right in our living. Jesus even says we are to exceed the scribes and Pharisees, those who attend closely to right living and demands of the law.

At least he uses the sermon to teach what he means: turn the other cheek; go the second mile, forgive your enemies... But how can we possibly measure up or not be broken by the weight of all that?



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Salt and light.

In the Mesopotamian world salt has meanings of purity and wisdom. Salt is different to light. It works in the background and is only noticed when absent (or has lost its taste) or when there is too much of it and it spoils food. But at the right amount it is a flavour enhancer - delicious, delicate, subtle. Wisdom can be like that. Its absence is noticed. So too is brash confidence or heavy imparting of information that damages relationships. Purity is perhaps not noticed unless absent as well.

You are the salt of the earth.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, light is an important way for describing the way of God. Those who are on the side of God are known as *children of the light*, for example. Jesus says in the sermon:

You are the light of the world.

You are.

Now, not if you have done something,
or if you measure up to expectations,
but now, you are!
Salt and light.

Purity,
wisdom,
on the side of God.

Now.
Perhaps still becoming,
and not perfect at it,
but you are, now,
salt and light as you
follow Jesus and live
in God's love.

There is a link here to John's gospel that seems helpful to ground what Jesus preaches. In that gospel we hear Jesus claiming his space when he says, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). You and I can be salt and light because of Jesus. As we love and follow and seek to live in God's way, we belong together as *children of the light*.

While that still doesn't make the journey easy, I find it something of a relief. Because which of us can live up to the measure of righteousness spoken by Jesus? But as Jesus is the light of the world and we are light by association, then our being a shining light is not something of our own power or strength. Purity, wisdom and right living belongs to the power of God. Our call is to be as fully open to Christ's teachings and God's love as we can be.

That's the challenge contained in the latter part of our text. And God knows it is important to who we are as church, or how we relate to the world if we are to be *children of the light*. For we struggle to live into our calling. We are in a deeply difficult time of history and pressures within and beyond the church cause tensions that are hard to resolve. How often do we feel the pain of others as they lash out at us over seemingly insignificant things? Can we see where we lash out at others and are less than we expect of ourselves, let alone what Jesus seeks?

But as Will Willimon puts it, Jesus loves us enough to teach us how to live as 'lights' to the world. The best way to be the most faithful light we are - or the purity and wisdom of salt we hope to be - is to listen, follow, and stick close to the one who lights our path. In other words, get so close that the light shines on and through us. As we hear from the prologue of John's gospel (John 1:5), *the light shines in the world and the darkness does not overcome it*.

You are, you are, you are.
And you are becoming.
May we lift our light
Christ's light
until light overcomes
even the darkest of places.

Singing - Tis 473

Community of Christ

OR TIS 712 Create in us a clean heart



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Offering

Rainbow God,
Accept the gifts we bring to you now,
Bless and guide those who will use them,
And through the work, may all know you dwell
within. Amen.

Notices

World Interfaith Harmony week continues
until Feb 7th. Feb 8 is *World Day of Prayer
and Reflection and Action against Human
Trafficking*.

Responding: Prayers for World & Community

In this time of epiphany, when the world is
hurting, people are struggling, God, the source of
healing and wisdom, guide us and heal us. Give
us the time and the desire to see what is before
us, to awaken the epiphany within, so we may
look out.

We hold those around the world who live in
unsafe homelands, whether civil or faith. May the
perpetrators of violence and fear come to
understand the meaning of peace and harmony
and the wellbeing of all people and environment.

Within our own homeland may we never lose
sight of those who are victims of violence, those
who suffer through unfair or unjustified
incarceration, those who have lost everything,
including hope following flooding around the
country.

During this week of *World Interfaith Harmony*, let
us remember all religions, Atheists and Humanists
call for peace, justice and tolerance. May we put
aside our hidden intolerances and be truly people
who work for peace, justice and tolerance.

*Let the rain come and wash away
the ancient grudges*

*and bitter hatreds held and nurtured over
generations.
Let the rain wash away the memory of the hurt,
the neglect.
Then let the sun come out and fill the sky with
rainbows,
Let the warmth of the sun heal us wherever we
are broken.
Let it burn away the fog so that we can see each
other clearly.
So that we can see beyond labels, beyond
accents, gender or skin colour.
Let the warmth and brightness of the sun melt
our selfishness,
so that we can share the joys and feel the
sorrows of our neighbours.
And let the sun be so strong that we will see all
people as our neighbours.
Let the earth, nourished by rain, bring forth
flowers to surround us with beauty.
And let the mountains teach our hearts to reach
upward to heaven⁺⁺*

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 - TiS 657

God of freedom, God of justice

OR TiS 417 Loving Spirit, loving Spirit
Or TiS 414 There's a Spirit in the air



Sunday February 5th, 2023 **The Fig Tree Worship Resource**

Blessing

Go in the power of God's good Spirit:
With the gentle fire of God's zeal,
With the breath of life,
Ready to work for justice and peace.

We go in Christ's name. Amen.

*Liturgy: Rev. Deacon Marian Bisset
using Uniting in Worship II;
Prayers of the World and Offering words
by Marian Bisset*

** 'shadow' changed to 'care'*

*** Rabbi Harold Kushner from 2019 Interreligious
Prayer Service for Peace and justice Celebrating World
Interfaith Harmony*

*Reflection: Rev. Arnie Wierenga
Presbytery of Gippsland*

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