



Sunday February 12th, 2023 **The Fig Tree Worship Resource**

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

From 1 Corinthians 3:9 -

*For we are God's servants, working together;
we are God's field, God's building.*

Gather us together,
God who calls us your children.
Sweep us under your wings of gracious embrace.
Teach us, in this time, to listen for you.

Gather us together,
Christ who calls us your siblings.
Accompany us with your stories of hope.
Teach us, in this time, to recognise you.

Gather us together,
Spirit who calls us into community.
Rest on us with the flame of your kindness.
Teach us, in this time, to let you lead us.

Light the candle.

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 - Holy, holy, holy TiS 132

Prayer

Listen to us, God in community,
Three-in-One, as we call to you,
Hear our gratitude.

Sung Refrain: TiS 741 -

O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer,
When I call answer me,



O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer,
Come and listen to me.

We rejoice with the crashing of the waves.
We warble with magpies at sunrise.
We chirp in time with cicadas at day's end.
We join in all creation's song of joy,
lending our small voices to the symphony,
each tree, each insect, each grain of sand,
an instrument of praise to you.
You were before, you are within
and will be beyond,
all our lives, thoughts, fears and triumphs.

Listen to us, God in community,
Three-in-One, as we call to you,
Hear our gratitude...

Sung Refrain: TiS 741 -

O Lord hear my prayer ...

Listen to us, God in community,
Three-in-One, as we call to you,
Hear our confession ...

We are great at making bad choices,
help us to choose the way that leads to life.
We confess that we often take what seems to be
the simplest solution, costing less, gaining more of
whatever we want, instead of embarking on the
costly path of love, generosity and patience.

We confess that we stay silent when we see
injustice, not wanting to make a scene, not
wanting to get involved, not wanting to be
interrupted, instead of challenging the dynamic
consequences of greed, apathy and hatred.

We confess that we get caught up in rage,
jealousy, anger, disappointment and despair with
each other. We hang on to old hurts and look for
new reasons for resentment. We are often
qualified in our forgiveness of others, and just as
hard on ourselves.

We confess that as a church we get sidetracked
into endless rosters, stacking chairs and counting
costs. We feel like we have failed you, and our
ancestors in the faith, and the generations to



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come, by not maintaining buildings, magnificent morning teas and bustling congregations. We get so wound up with our losses that we fail to see where you are at work, and fail to imagine how we can participate.

Sung Refrain: TiS 741 -

O Lord hear my prayer...

Siblings in Christ, hear this and live as if you believe it; that nothing can separate us from the merciful love of God, known to us in Jesus the Christ.

We are forgiven, set free, made new again.
Ready to choose the way leading to life
for the sake of the world that God loves,
Thanks be to God, Amen.

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Deuteronomy 30: 15-20
Psalm 119:1-8

Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD.
Happy are those who keep his decrees,
who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways.

You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.
**O that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!**
Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
**I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous ordinances.**
I will observe your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me.

Read: 1 Corinthians 3: 1-9
Matthew 5: 21-37

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

Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton

Jack Charles' big choice came last time he was in jail. It was 2005, and it was his 22nd time in prison. After a traumatic childhood, which had included sexual abuse, he had struggled with alcohol and drug addiction. To fund his addictions, he had become a notorious cat burglar. Not long before he was due for release, he undertook the month-long Marumali Journey of Healing program for members of the Stolen Generation. It was aimed at providing social and emotional healing.

Jack found it hard work, but it set him on a path of self-discovery. Jack Charles reflected on his turbulent life, and made the decision that the time had come for him to take himself seriously. He decided to get off the methadone, and he set himself the aim of being the real deal, a man beyond reproach, and an elder in the Aboriginal community.

His life changed profoundly, and he spent the rest of his life seeking to be a role model and an encourager for Aboriginal men. In between acting jobs, Jack spent his time mentoring Aboriginal youths and men who were in prison or youth detention centres. He was Senior Victorian Australian of the Year in 2016, and when he died in September 2022, he was given a State Funeral.

Some choices matter a little, but some matter a lot. Clearly, Jack Charles' decision was one that changed the whole direction of his life. If he'd continued on the path he was on when he went into jail, chances are that he would have continued on his path of self-destruction.

What we choose to believe and what we aim for in life, these are very important decisions.

The decision that faces the people of Israel in today's Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy is a very important one. They are assembled to hear Moses make his farewell speech. Moses will not enter the Promised

Land, but the people are on the brink of entering



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the land which they have been travelling towards for so long.

God knows that the people of Israel will face many temptations when they enter the Promised Land. The biggest of these temptations will be for the people of Israel to give up their identity and their distinctiveness as the People of God, and to assimilate into the general population, and follow their lifestyle and worship their pagan gods. Remember, they are not entering an empty country. They will be a minority group amongst the Canaanite population, so in that scenario it can be tempting to want to blend in.

So, God uses Moses to exhort the people to make the right choice. Moses implores them, "Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Deuteronomy 30:19b-20

Jesus is also demanding that his followers choose life-giving ways. He is demanding that they (and we) as a community and individuals really seek to live all of life according to God's directions. And he wants them (and us) to go beyond a superficial obedience to the law but rather to seek to live lives totally attuned to God.

We are called to live in such an honest and straightforward way that our lives and our speech are trustworthy. "Let your word be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no' ..."

Clearly, Jesus wants us to choose to be obedient to God in every aspect of our lives. Not just in our actions but also in our speech and even our thoughts. This is his version of Moses' "Choose life."

And clearly this is what we are called to do. However, Jesus knows, just as we know, that even with our very best intentions and efforts we will fail to do this. Just like the community at Corinth whom Paul addresses in today's New Testament reading we are prone to getting lost or side tracked or becoming quarrelsome or jealous or falling out with each other or forgetting to be guided by God. We suffer breaks in our

relationships, and sometimes even in our marriages. We are sometimes more like infants or children in our relationship with Christ than mature, faithful adults.

But that is not a reason to give up on our efforts to try to live faithfully. God's heart is huge and all encompassing, and God will forgive us when we fail as long as we are willing to own our frailty, weaknesses and failures. God can and will pick up the broken pieces of our failures and fashion them into something wonderful and new. We can trust that God will be with us and will guide us and wants us to have the very best life possible. So, choose the path of faithfulness, and God will be with you. Amen.

Singing - Your words to me TiS 430

or ***Company of stumblers*** Tune - AURELIA: (TiS 457)

The church's one foundation
is moving with the flock.
The Christ, not held in structures,
this boat, not moored in dock.
The future seems uncertain
the past, her vision wild,
we break the bread together
and feed her like your child.

When we come to the crossroads,
not knowing what's ahead
we weigh up all the outcomes,
of where we might be led,
we wait in anxious stillness
amid the pending strife,
your Spirit whispers gently,
just choose the path of life.

For we are all God's servants,
we're pilgrims on the way,
a company of stumblers
made from a common clay.
We'll seek the path of justice,
the trail that leads to life,
the road of loving-kindness,
where all might know the Christ.

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Offering

May the Spirit bless us and these gifts we bring. Together, may we be signs of the inbreaking of God's mysterious, surprising and abundant love wherever it is needed. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Notices

Tomorrow, Feb 13th is the Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations 2008. "We commemorate the apology to keep the spirit of its words and their meaning alive. The commemoration is a very real part of the healing journey. One that encourages us to keep looking for new ways to work together for genuine change in the lives of our survivors and their descendants."

– CEO, The Healing Foundation, Fiona Petersen
<https://healingfoundation.org.au/apology-2/>

Feb 17th 2014: is the date of the murder of Iranian Asylum Seeker Reza Barati in Offshore Immigration Detention.

Prayers for World & Community

Listen to us, God in community,
Three-in-One, as we call to you,
hear our prayers for each other and the world.

We hold before you all the places of conflict and hurting people of the world. Those caught in wars and disputes over land and livelihoods, those living under oppressive regimes, those trapped in dangerous domestic situations.

We hold before you all the pain of the land and her creatures, suffering under our constant greedy abuse and misuse.
We hold before you all the hurt and brokenness in our lives and those around us.

We hold before you the pain of your church torn apart by divisions, dismembered by traditions, and we lift up the blessing of brave leadership calling us into a new future.
Where there is darkness, bring love.
Where there is hopelessness, bring vision.
Where there is hatred, bring kinship.
Where there is suffering, bring release.

As we pray together in our first language the words that Jesus taught his disciples:

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 - Forth in your name TiS 571

or Take my life and let it be - TiS 599

Blessing

**As we go from our gathering,
God of grace and mercy,
help us to choose the path of faithfulness
being bearers of your love
in all we say, think and do.**

Go knowing that you are loved
unconditionally and extravagantly.
Go and share that love
in the same way you have received it.
And all the people say: **Amen**

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