



Sunday February 19th, 2023 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Introduction and Invitation:

The last Sunday before Ash Wednesday in the church's calendar is Transfiguration Sunday. Just as the transfiguration prepared Jesus for the journey to the cross, so also, as we approach Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season, we take time to hear this story of the glory of Christ.

During Lent you are invited to journey with us using the *Wild Fig Tree Lenten Resource*, attached to the end of this resource and offered each week throughout Lent.

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Psalm 99:1-5 (NIRV)

The Lord rules.

Let the nations tremble.

He sits on his throne between the cherubim.

Let the earth shake.

Great is the Lord in Zion.

He is honored over all of the nations.

Let them praise his great and wonderful name.

He is holy.

The King is mighty. He loves what is fair.

He has set up the rules for fairness.

He has done what is right and fair

for the people of Jacob.

Honor the Lord our God.

Worship at his feet. He is holy.

(light the candle)

Let us worship God.

Acknowledging



As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians (*please name them*) 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

or : Here in this place / Gather us in, TiS 474



Prayer

Holy and glorious God,
Your holiness and glory
appeared to the people of Israel
like a hungry fire.
We see you in Jesus the Christ.
To the disciples with Jesus on that mountain,
your holiness and glory surrounded them
like a bright cloud.
It transformed the face of Jesus
so it shone like the sun,
And even his clothes shone dazzling white.
In such a manifestation of your presence
surely, we too would fall down.
But you speak to us in Jesus.
You call us to know your Beloved.
To listen to him.

The burdens we carry he will take.
The sin that weighs us down, he has dealt with.
"Get up and do not be afraid" he says
with a gentle touch.
Transform our lives Holy God,
giving us hearts that long to walk in your ways,
that we might be lovers of justice
and people of mercy who take refuge in you.

Assurance

from 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. (ESV)

Now the Lord is the Spirit,
and where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom.
And we all, with unveiled face,
beholding the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image
from one degree of glory to another.
For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

In Jesus the Christ we are forgiven
and transformed!
Thanks be to God!



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Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Exodus 24: 12-18
Matthew 17:1-9

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

Reflecting - Rev. Jennie Gordon

transfiguration
Matthew 17: 1-9

there is a place
where heaven's cloud embraces earth
and ancients meet
and faithful fearful fall at his feet
where shekinah shines
unperturbed, untranslated, undisturbed

there is a place
where holy touch embraces fear
and veils are thin
and listening becomes the path
where life is heard
and ears are freshly opened to the word

there is a place
where mystery's cloud embraces flesh
within each soul
and heaven's cry calls clear:
you are my child
get up and do not fear

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Dad & Daughter, Poems and Prayers on the Gospel Yrs A B & C

On this Sunday when we hear the story of the Transfiguration, again, as we do each year before we step through the gates of Ash Wednesday and onto the path of Lent, it's tempting to think it's all about glory.

The scene is set up a high mountain, by themselves. High mountains are places of connection with the Most High as seen in the Exodus reading. Here, only the chosen inner circle is invited to witness what happens, and Glory is certainly a key theme! Jesus is transfigured, whiter than white, in the glorious presence of Moses and Elijah, some say they represent the law and the prophets. It's a 'thin place', as Celtic wisdom would say. It's a meeting place of the known and the unknown, of heaven and earth, of outrageous possibility, and of fear.

Fear has a place here on the mountain, and I don't think this is 'holy fear', where you might gaze in awe at something majestic like a sunset or a generous act of deep kindness. I think this is outright, terrifying fear that the disciples experience on this mountain.

Fear has a place in our lives and in our communities of faith even though we don't like to talk about it. It's much easier to talk about love, hope, joy and peace, than it is to talk about fear. Yet here in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus, here is fear, terror. The kind of glimpse of the glory of God that sends you to your knees, averting your eyes, trembling as it says in Psalm 99.

None of us are strangers to fear and the whole-body response that goes with it. Our throat tightens, our breathing and pulse quicken, we sweat, we shake, we stumble and freeze, fight or take flight. Thinking calmly and clearly becomes impossible. It's a mechanism that detects danger and tries to protect us. Even thinking about fear makes our heart rate quicken. Stop now, pause and take a few long, slow breaths before we go on.

Other places in Matthew's gospel note this fear response to the unexpected, upside-down and unimaginable ways of Jesus the Christ. Jesus calms a storm, and the disciples are beset by fear (8:26). Jesus heals the person who is paralysed and the crowds respond with fear (9:8). Jesus walks on the water and calms the again fearful, shrieking disciples (14:27) and reaches out to the fearful, sinking Peter (14:30). The terrified women at the empty tomb are greeted by a reassuring angel (28:5). Jesus makes a resurrection appearance and begins with... yes, ... do not be afraid (28:10).

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Fear causes us to look away, to become distracted, to stop in our tracks and go on the defensive. Theologian Will Willimon notes that there's something about Jesus that tended to make those close to Jesus scared half out of their wits. Does he have the same effect on us? If not, why not?

Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus approaches the disciples who are curled up inside their own fear and touches them. He approaches, and he touches, and he tells them to rise, get up and do not be afraid.

This story sits in Matthew's gospel after Jesus has been telling the disciples about his journey to Jerusalem involving suffering, death and then resurrection. Peter has rebuked him, and Jesus tells Peter to get out of the way. There is a climate of fear brewing here. Death is on the doorstep. Maybe Jesus' words to the disciples are a reminder to himself as well. Get up, and do not fear. Rise above the paralysis of fear and do what needs to be done.

Some wondering questions for you from today's reading that you may want to share with someone you trust:

When might you have experienced terrifying fear in your journey of faith? What happened? How did your fear help you to grow?

Is fear stopping you from walking the way of Jesus? Is fear stopping your church community from walking the way of Jesus? What is behind the fear? What do you need in order to get up and not be afraid?

Singing - How good Lord, to be here TiS 234

or O Laughing Light - TiS 255 and use well-known tune
ISTE CONFESSOR - TiS 61

Offering

Glorious God of high mountains and ordinary people. We bring our gifts hoping that they might be blessed by your Spirit of life, and be used to bless others in ways we may not always see or understand. Amen.

Notices

Tomorrow, Feb 20th is the World Day of Social Justice. This year's theme focuses on the recommendations of Our Common Agenda to strengthen global solidarity and to re-build trust in government by "Overcoming Barriers and Unleashing Opportunities for Social Justice". <https://www.un.org/en/observances/social-justice-day>

Tuesday Feb 21st is Pancake Tuesday and it's not too late to have some flipping fun! You can still register an event here: <https://victas.pancakeday.com.au/vic-tas/> and raise money for communities across the Vic/Tas Synod.

Then it's Ash Wednesday, on Feb 22nd - the resource attached invites you to join us on a Lenten Journey with the *Wild Fig Tree Lenten Resource* and to join a WhatsApp group for companionship along the way.

Prayers for World & Community

Lover of justice and Mighty King,
Your glory settled on Mt Sinai
and covered it with a cloud
that appeared as a devouring fire
to the people of Israel.
Moses drew near,
and you revealed your law
for the instruction of the people.
May kings, rulers
and those who lead others today,
receive true wisdom from you,
that all people of the world might live in
reconciliation and peace.
God of glory, **hear our prayer.**

Majestic Glory,
you revealed the majesty and splendour of Jesus
your Beloved,
in transfiguring brilliance of dazzling white
and his face shining like the sun.
Transfigure your church today



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that your glory may be revealed
in the sacrificial love of your people
to one another.

God of glory, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Lord,
Peter, James and John fell down in fear
when the cloud of your glory
overshadowed them
and they heard your voice.
Teach us afresh what it means to worship you
Holy God
that we might honour you with our lives
and be spotlights that reveal
your extravagant love for all you created.
God of glory, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate God,
Your Son was bathed in the radiance of glory and
majesty,
and he set his face in obedience
towards rejection, suffering and death.
May those who suffer today
experience the healing power of your grace
and the constancy of your love, compassion,
and presence.
God of glory, **hear our prayer.**

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 - Lord of all hopefulness TiS 613

or - Our God, our help in ages past TiS 47

Blessing

from Numbers 6:24–26 (NIRV)

May the LORD bless you
and take good care of you.
May the LORD smile on you
and be gracious to you.
May the LORD look on you with favor
and give you his peace.
Amen

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Wild Fig Tree Lenten Resource - Ash Wednesday Feb 22 - 26, 2023

Invitation

Matthew 6:6:

*But whenever you pray
go into your room and shut the door...*

In this beginning of our Lenten journey together, you are invited to find wilderness spaces where you can go each day and 'shut the door'. It might be outside; at the beach, in a forest, by a river or lake, on a park bench around the corner or on your verandah. Or it might be inside your house, a small corner with images and items that remind you of wild things and wild places. Most likely it will not be silent, all sorts of sounds will be around you, but it will be a place where you can be still, and dwell in your relationship with God, the sacred source of all that is. You can choose the amount of time you spend there each day, sometimes more, sometimes less. The forty days of Lent reminds us of the story of Noah, the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt and the time Jesus experienced after his baptism. Today you are invited to make a commitment to turn up, daily during Lent, to spend time in the sacred space of wilderness.

Companions

There are passages from scripture, prayers, poems, suggestions and questions to accompany you on your way. You will find, as you pause in the wilderness each day, that ideas, songs, wonderings, thoughts and feelings arise. You might want to use a journal. It's good to have people to share your experience with. Who will you share this time with?

You're invited to join a WhatsApp group called *Wild Fig Tree Lenten Companions*. It will operate for the season of Lent as a forum for sharing this wilderness time. If you don't have it already, download the App and to join please contact Rev. Jennie Gordon at pastoral.ucagipps@gmail.com.

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2: 12

*Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me
with all your heart, with fasting, with
weeping, and with mourning;*

Find a gift of dried leaves on the ground around you. Burn them safely and mix the ash with oil to anoint your hands or head. Mourn for the creatures, the habitats, the lands and waters, the earth and her life. Mourn for what is lost within you and around you, and what might have been. Mourn for our collective turning away from doing what is good. Offer your mourning as a prayer of lament.

Stay with the ashes.

Thursday Feb 23th

Psalm 51: 10

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

'Our hands are empty and our hearts are often full of wrong things,' says a communion liturgy from the Wild Goose Worship Group. What is your heart full of?

It is wise to travel lightly, especially in the wilderness. What do you need to unpack, to let God clean out, to release as this journey begins?

Friday Feb 24th

Matthew 6:21

*For where your heart is,
there your treasure will be also.*

Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be.
All that you possess will never set you free.
Seek the things that last; come and learn from me.
Where your treasure is, your heart shall be.

w&m: Marty Haugen, 2000

<https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/where-your-treasure-is-print-g5443>

Saturday Feb 25th

Listen ...

Rev. Jennie Gordon

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