



First Sunday in Lent - February 26th, 2023

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*

*Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no
iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ---
-(from Ps 32)*

We come in need of God's light
to shine amongst our shadows.

As we begin the season of Lent
we remember - Christ is our light.

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 - TIS 159

God whose farm is all creation

OR TIS 100 All creatures of our God and King

Listening

Read: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7



Prayer

God of creating wonder,
we come before you in awe and praise
as we recall the way you moved
over the waters of creation;
as you fashioned humans from the earth.

God of our light,
we recall how in darkness we wither
but your light offers warmth
and healing where there are shadows.

We hear stories of temptation:
Surely it is good to have knowledge!
Surely understanding good and evil is our right!

But like the man and woman in the garden,
your light catches us,
confronts us,
reminds us that
whatever right or capacity
we believe of ourselves
pales in your light and wisdom.

We are drawn to your light
and it finds us naked.
We acknowledge you,
and we find you forgive
the guilt of our sin.

a reflective silence is kept

Siblings in Christ,
the light draws us out of our shadows.
Through Christ, in Christ we declare in faith:
Our sins are forgiven. **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: Romans 5:12-19 &
Matthew 4:1-11

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

Reflecting - Rev. Gospel Ralte

In Genesis we hear of God forming man from the dust of the ground and breathing him into life. We hear from there of the man and woman living in the garden under God's care. They (and we) have free will - the ability to choose. What we decide at any moment isn't forced upon us. This is the uniqueness of relationship God has designed to exercise within the universe.

As part of this order, God commands the man in the garden, "You shall not eat of this, ... otherwise you will surely die." Eating of all trees are permitted except one. This command comes in love. These are not the words of a dictator, rather one of relationship and place – how people are to live in God's created order. With relationship and free will comes responsibility and consequence. The man and woman know that to defy God has great consequences. But they still have choice to decide what to do.

The serpent knows what God has commanded and finds the man and woman. Didn't God know about the snake? Of course, God knew it. But God has not blocked or eradicated free will, whether it be used for good or evil.

The scene is set for a battle of will and obedience; a battle of good against evil; a battle of which voice to listen to. Free human will is neither under the control of God or the serpent. The man and woman are taken in by the snake. What the serpent says seems to make sense of what God has commanded. The serpent plays God off against the man and woman, and they cannot resist the promise to be godlike themselves. They cannot resist the promise of power. Surely knowledge of good and evil is a good thing!

Evil triumphs over good. The covenant between God and humans is broken. The relationship of trust is broken and cannot be restored. The man and woman will find themselves expelled from the garden, once what they have done is brought to the light.

The apostle Paul (in the book of Romans) speaks of these things as a history. Sin is like a curse, an inherited stain upon all of humanity. When Adam and Eve fell into temptation, all of us did. We cannot escape what they could not escape. Everyone on earth is born with that unwanted but unavoidable consequence "you will surely die"; being dead in relationship with God, the Creator.

As such, we have failed God and our fellow human beings and other creations in many and various ways. The apostle speaks of the price of this, one that needs to be paid for. We don't have the power in our own strength of heart to be in relationship with God as is described before the fall. We cannot save ourselves from falling into temptation. It is as though the serpent continues to appeal to our pride and ego and tempt us beyond our capacity to live.

However, God's love and concern always follow, look after, and guide us. After the fall a battle was declared, with nothing less at stake than human

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redemption (Gen 3:15). The battle lines have been drawn.

In the Old Testament, God makes a new covenant with the people; when that is broken God tries again and again and again. A final covenant is needed, one that will restore our relationship with God and free us from sin.

God's only Son comes to us in Godly obedience, to live our life and die our death in order that we may live. It is a free gift, one that releases us from the power of sin. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world shows mercy on us.

Temptations still come. In the wilderness, Jesus demonstrated his power to resist the tempter. Listening to the voice and will and word of God is the greatest weapon to defeat evil. We have an ongoing battle of choice every day.

Whose voice do we choose to listen to?

Singing - TiS 129 Amazing grace

OR TiS 211 Jesus lover of my soul

OR TiS 591 Forty days and forty nights

Offering

God of wilderness places,
you have upheld many who struggle in the wild.
May these gifts be used in your name to uphold
all through places of wilderness and temptation.
Amen.

Notices

The season of Lent runs from February 22 (Ash Wednesday) until April 8 (Easter Saturday). It covers 40 days with Sundays not counted as they are days we celebrate that Christ is risen.

Next Sunday, **March 5th**, is *Clean Up Australia* day.

Prayers for World & Community

God who breathes life into all of creation,
we pray for the world, our community and our church.

We pray:

For a world marking difficult anniversaries of war...

For a world tempted by power, wealth, greed and exploitation...

For communities where important voices may never be heard...

For communities struggling for life in the wake of intense financial strain ...

For a church tempted by being safe and secure in what we've always done...

For a church tempted to lose itself in worldly promises...

We pray for those things that touch us deeply ...

A time of silence is kept

As we bring these concerns and burdens before you, we recall that in Jesus Christ we find strength to live justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

And so we pray together with Jesus' words:

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,

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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.

Liturgy: Rev. Arnie Wierenga
Reflection: Rev. Gospel Ralte
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Singing - TiS 684

Love will be our Lenten calling

OR TiS 668 Touch the earth lightly

OR TiS 417 Loving Spirit

Blessing

As Jesus finds temptation in the wilderness, he
also shows us how to listen to the voice of God.

Through the psalmist God says (Ps 32):

I will instruct you and teach you

the way you should go;

I will counsel you

with my eye upon you.

Siblings in Christ,

Go now, intent on God's voice.

Go knowing what Christ has done for you.

Go to bless and be blessed,

in the name of the Creator,

Redeemer, and

Sustainer. Amen.

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Wild Fig Tree Lenten Resource - Feb 27 - March 4, 2023

Invitation

Through this Lenten time, 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, 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're also 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 and will inform our reflections. To join the group please contact Rev. Jennie Gordon at pastoral.ucagipps@gmail.com.

Monday Feb 27th

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

What is your relationship with the wild spaces around you? What happens when you hear this verse from the creation story and wonder about humanity's place in the order of things?

Is your prayer one of lament, gratitude, confession, hope ..., or a mixture of all of those and more? Spend time in prayer, in quiet contemplation, waiting / writing / walking.

Tuesday Feb 28th

*God is walking in the garden
in the cool of day.*

*God is walking in the garden
"where are you?" she says.*

*We heard you walking,
we heard you coming this way.*

*We heard you walking,
we hid because we're afraid.*

*God is walking in the garden
in the cool of day.*

Dave Brown, verse 1 - God is walking in the garden
<https://brunswick.unitingchurch.org.au/worship/the-arts-in-worship/tune-in/>

God is looking for you in the garden, where will you be found? Imagine the conversation that might unfold.

Wednesday March 1st

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

What does it mean to be led 'up/into' the wilderness, to enter it fully and be embraced by it, immersed, in relationship with it?

There's a sense of gentle-leading by the Spirit in this account. With open hands and heart, invite the Spirit to lead you as we journey together through Lent.

Thursday March 2nd

What is this wilderness of Lent that we have entered? Is it a hot, dry, red dust place with hidden watercourses, cracked earth and crisp, clear nights? Or is it green and lush, filled with untamed sounds and smells of life where locusts and wild honey are in abundant supply? Or is it something else?

Time to unleash your inner artist! Find paper or your journal and go wild! Using pencils/paints/pastels/chalk; draw, scribble, doodle - whatever comes to you.

Friday March 3rd

Matthew 4:11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

What a relief! When the darkness departs and the angels arrive. Is that familiar to you? Have you been beside someone else in that situation? Do you know someone who is longing for this release and relief, or might it be you?

Is there a song or hymn that comes to mind? There are some songs on the album *Lamentations* by Bifrost Artists that you might find will speak into this longing for light and gratitude for grace. You can find it online.

Play, read or sing your songs as prayer.

Saturday March 4th

Listen

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