



Second Sunday in Lent - March 5th, 2023

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Leader:

If we come knowing that we are less than perfect,
sometimes wise, often mistaken,

All: then we are in the right place.

If we come feeling inadequate in the presence of an
awesome God who deserves the highest praise,
then we are in the right place.

If we have come with an ache in our hearts or
feeling helpless, **then we can cry to God together**

If we have come wanting to rest our weariness
then we are here with good reason.

If we have come from the rich mixture of life with
gratitude for all that God has done for us,
then we can express our praise together.

The joy of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, be with you all.
And also with you.

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 626

Lord of creation to you be all praise!

OR TiS 174 Morning glory starlit sky



Prayer

Loving God, as we join in worship we take the risk
again of opening our lives to you.

We know that many times before miracles have
happened:

people have discovered your love for them,
your forgiveness, your challenge to them,
that you stretch our minds,
you help us grow in faith,
call us to change direction and follow you
then send us out to serve you.

Help us to believe it can happen again, even now.

For we know you as the God who stands with us in
our need, you are the God who is our help both in
ages past and our hope for years to come. We
worship you through Christ our Lord. Amen

Psalm 121

Options include reading it OR
for a sung version see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvrCDjohof0>

OR for a visual reflection by Rev. Ian Brown:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/h1g3x2a00sauj33/Ps121.m4v?dl=0>

Prayer of Confession

... when we are overwhelmed by the world's
darkness;

Sung Response: TiS 725 - In our darkness

Holy and gracious God, you created this earth,
green, brown, red, soft and harsh; and you called it
good. You made the oceans depths, the soaring
mountains, the tectonic plates beneath. When we
take too much for granted, forgive us.
God, you gifted us the powers of nature and gave us
creative minds to develop them; When we have
taken too much for granted, when we are



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overwhelmed by the world's darkness;
In our darkness...

We cry with all those who are grieving. How long will the poor and vulnerable suffer? How long will parents have to bury their children? God of grief and anger, we know that even in the valley of the shadow, still we are held, still we are loved. You are the God we know as the one who cares for the widow and the orphan, the homeless and the refugee, you are the measure of compassion and mercy, so when we are overwhelmed by the world's darkness;

In our darkness...

Before you, God, we find the safety we need to be open; we open before you our fears and the darkness we have no words for. In trust we open to you our doubts, our uncertainties, our reluctance to change, our fear of what the future holds, when we are overwhelmed by the world's darkness;

In our darkness...

... and to you God we turn again, for yours is all mercy and forgiveness, through Christ, Amen. Sisters and brothers, Jesus came not to bring condemnation but to save. In Christ there is forgiveness and healing for all who ask for grace. Our sin is forgiven! **Thanks be to God**

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Genesis 12:1-4a
John 3:1-17

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

Reflecting - Rev. Veronica Bradley

My brother is just out from the United States for a couple of months to reconnect with family. He and his wife and daughter packed up and left Australia in 2019 and moved to Florida to live. In our age such changes are not unfamiliar and many of us live with our children and grandchildren living far away from us. We are so far removed from the culture and ways of today's text we may miss the significance of Abram leaving his country, his kindred, his father's house. Perhaps our first nations people could teach us something of the significance of the grief that Abraham would have experienced in the loss of his connection to place, culture, and family.

Our text this week begins with God speaking to Abram. Genesis 11:31 tells us that Terah, Abram's father has taken Abram, his wife Sarai and his grandson Lot and they have set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. We are not told why, and we are not told why they stopped and settled in Haran. We are told that Terah died in Haran and then *God spoke to Abram*. And what happens when God speaks? Fleming Rutledge makes the connection here with Genesis 1 that the sacred story begins with God speaking. ***"The whole Bible is based on the claim that God has spoken."***[1]

What does God say when he speaks to Abram?

Leave your home, your land, your heritage, and I will show you a land. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great God says. I will make you to be a blessing.

When God speaks, the words reveal God's nature, character, God's very being. God exists and speaks. God's words are revelation. We cannot as human beings believe God exists, that God speaks, that God transforms what is, to what can be, without God's revelation to us. And God reveals God's self to Abram, and takes a man stuck halfway to the intended destination, and his barren wife and fatherless nephew, and invites them to journey with God into a new life in a new land.



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I love this story in our Lenten journey. It makes me wonder what God might be saying to us in the church today?

“Go, leave this stuff you’re holding onto, leave what is familiar and safe, go to a new place that I am going to show you. I will make you, I will bless you, I will make you a blessing to others.” Maybe it's not a physical place but a place as God’s people we have got stuck. Maybe we as a church are afraid to let go of what is familiar and safe for us. Maybe we are afraid of the unknown, the future. Maybe we don’t feel we could be a blessing to others. But God calls us not to look at ourselves but to God and God’s promises that never fail. God will do what God promises – that is the story of salvation history. That is the story of the apostles, prophets and martyrs of the faith. We are invited to make that our story too.

What a promise! What a God! What a call! Are we willing to put our trust in this God of Abram. A God who comes to us to speak, to invite, to call, to transform. A God who takes ordinary people and shows through them the most extravagant love and mercy and grace to a world in desperate need. For God so loved the world he said to his son “Go and lead them home.” What could our churches look like if we responded to this call like Abram did? What new land might God be wanting to lead the people of God to today?

[1] Rutledge, Fleming. 2011. *And God Spoke To Abraham: Preaching from the Old Testament*. (Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company) pg 29.

Singing - TiS 47 O God our help in ages past

OR TiS 464 Seek, O seek the Lord

OR TiS 242 I danced in the morning

Offering

God of abundant hospitality and love, bless what we offer that it may join in your hospitality and welcome to all who come seeking. Engage us in your journey of reflection and discovery through Lent. Amen.

Notices

International women’s day is celebrated on **March 8th**.

Prayers for World & Community

For all who raise their eyes and look for help, we pray. Too often, God, if we’re honest, we’ve seen those eyes looking for help.

Looking out of our screens in the midst of rubble that used to be their homes, tears streaming from those eyes, down the dust caked cheeks, wondering where their help will come from.

And the bewildered eyes of first nations people, hoping to be listened to for a change and finding too many who’d rather look anywhere else.

Those eyes looking up, not for help but scared and scanning the sky for drones and missiles. A long year into war, we wonder where will their help come from and will the help make it worse or better?

The ones lifted and looking about churches at reduced numbers, at the scant resources and the visual echoes of past faithfulness that no longer fit the needs of those looking now for your help, your life giving presence. For all these we pray.

As we get about in our own streets, we see those looking to us for help, with eyes that mask a troubled story, eyes glazed with a craving need, and so many that seem just lost, not knowing where to look for help.

And we, feeling inadequate, are a little too concerned they might be looking at us.

So together, we join our voices with yours in concern for all these, and then in the quiet we name those who are most on our hearts, in need and looking for help:

Gracious God,
hear our prayers,
be our help,



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Answer, even in ourselves,
with the courage to be part of the help you bring,
through Christ who calls us to pray:

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 164 The great love of God

OR TiS 691 Faith will not grow from words alone

Blessing

We have looked to the hills
and know our help comes from God

We have journeyed with Abram
and in risk, know your promise.

Confronted by the need for newness, we go,
to be blown in new ways by your Spirit.

We go our way confident that in all things
we are blessed by the great love of God,
strengthened by the resolve of Jesus Christ
and rejuvenated by the power
of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Liturgy: Rev. Ian Brown
Reflection: Rev. Veronica Bradley
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Wild Fig Tree Lenten Resource - March 6-11, 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, or it might be inside. 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 may choose to have a journal ready, maybe with coloured pencils and paper.

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 March 6th

Matthew 17:1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.

What 'high mountain-top' moments have you experienced? Is there a 'thin place' for you where earth and heaven seem to be touching? If you can, return and dwell there, physically or in your imagination, offering a prayer of thanks for this holy space.

Tuesday March 7th

We will love

Ch: *We will walk with you at the edges
We will die with you on the cross-roads
We will live in your dangerous places
We will love*

Graeme Gardiner

-full text, music and midi files here:

https://craigmitchell.typepad.com/mountain_masala/music-for-worship-streaming-and-recorded.html

What does it mean to be with Jesus at the edges, the cross-roads, the dangerous places? What does love look like there? You could email Graeme through the link above and share your thoughts in response to his song.

Wednesday March 8th


John 3:8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Get comfy and sit still for 5 minutes, or more, and watch the world around you. Is there a rushing wind or a gentle breeze? Or does the movement of people or traffic cause dust, leaves and litter to stir? What sounds can you hear? What happens with your breathing as you sit still? How might you tune in to the movement of the Spirit in a similar and intentional way?

Thursday March 9th

*Enter the wild with care, my love
And speak the things you see
Let new names take and root
and thrive and grow
And even as you travel far
from heather, crag and river ... Lost Words,
Spell Songs.*

Here's a treat for you! As we journey through this Lenten wilderness time it is not a barren space. It is full of life, all around us. Listen to the Lost Words Blessing (over and over). Let it take you somewhere... stay for a while.

 [The Lost Words Blessing](#)

Friday March 10th

Psalms 121:1 I lift up my eyes to the hills-- from where will my help come?

Where do you look for help? Where do you find what you are looking for? Trace around your hand. Along each finger note a place, a poem, a picture, a pet or a person that helps you to sense the presence of God when you feel lost. Is that easy or hard? If you want to, choose someone safe to show and share your hand-print of help.

Saturday March 11th

Listen

*Presbytery of Gippsland
Rev. Jennie Gordon
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