



## Fourth Sunday in Lent - March 19th, 2023 Anniversary Issue of The Fig Tree Worship Resource

**WOW! Wow! Wow! Here we are having gone once around the Revised Common Lectionary! Three years of a weekly worship resource from the Presbytery of Gippsland!**

Here's a message from the Moderator of the UCA Synod of Vic/Tas:

*Congratulations to the team behind the Fig Tree Worship Resource! With such well written liturgy and spirit-filled reflections, the value of this resource has proved itself as more and more gatherings of God's people have made use of it to support and enable their worship. I'm grateful to God for the creativity behind the project, and glad to celebrate a whole three-year cycle of service. May God continue to bring inspiration for God's people through it!*

Peace and grace,  
**David Fotheringham**  
Moderator

**Wondering how to show your appreciation for this resource? We're enjoying reading your emails, so keep them coming...** and our team invite you to make an online donation to say thanks to Natalie for providing a wonderful resource that we regularly use to find suitable hymns and songs:

**Natalie Sims, The Lectionary Singer:**  
<https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/LectionarySinger>

### **Call to worship & Lighting the Candle**

Called and awakened  
we come together to worship  
**Anointed and summoned**  
**we hear your beckoning and respond**

People who are beloved of God  
you are known and welcomed  
**Whoever we are, people of big faith, little faith,**  
**dwindling faith and no faith**

There is a place for us around this table of love.

*The Fig Tree Worship Resource comes to you from the Presbytery of Gippsland, Uniting Church in Australia with blessings and permission to use the content in worship services with acknowledgement.*

### **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 - O Christ the healer TiS 638**

can also be sing to TALLIS' CANON



### **Prayer**

*Well, seeing we are celebrating today, the full three years of Figtree Resource, a gratitude prayer is in order! Looking back at our first one 3 years ago, we have come a long way, yet in a way we still stand in the same place.*

God of constancy and consistency, you have stood with us through huge changes. When we 'sheltered in place' you sat with us, providing new forms of manna and Living Water. We saw new sources of Light and Love and knew our gathering in a whole different way. We give thanks for your many blessings and the sure knowledge that we all need each other to survive and flourish. Your nourishment and care in so many ways has blessed us. The Figtree Resource has been an important source of manna and we give thanks for every single person who contributes, in direct ways, in posting and photocopying and in using it in ways which have blessed us all. And thanks for the editors! And so say all of us. AMEN

Sleeper awake! God of Light, As you summon us into light and fruitfulness we become more aware of the shadows. Sometimes in the shadows we can hide in the corners. As your light awakens us we move from the darkness and are exposed. And right there your



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love and grace surround us as we face ourselves and each other.

Forgive us for the times that we have linked people's physical inability to see with a lack of understanding, when we have been like spiritual leaders who have associated sin and physical impairment and have ignored the agency and voice of others. Help us to fully appreciate 'difference', and to reach out in love and welcome to all who we regard as 'other', and offer them wholeness through the healing soil of full dignity.

Lead us through the valley of our own discontent, our own abrasiveness and easy annoyances. Help us to seek what is good and right and true and pleasing to the Lord.

Help us to centre ourselves in real fruitfulness, to exercise the fruits of the Spirit in good and right relationships with each other and within ourselves. This is Harmony Week and we long to live in harmony with others, with you and with the natural world. Help us to live out of kindness and gentleness even in those moments when our patience is tested or our guard is down. Heal and restore us, awaken us and lead us into light and love we pray. AMEN

### ***Passing the peace***

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

### ***Listening***

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Read: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

### ***Singing - The Lord's my shepherd TiS 10***

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Read: Ephesians 5:8-14  
John 9:1-41

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

### ***Reflecting - Rev. Jennie Gordon***

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The first thing I noticed was that she carried a particularly unpleasant odour. Her dirty clothes hung from a thin body, wild hair framed a sullen face and she moved slowly, physically exhausted, spent. It wasn't unexpected to encounter someone in this condition at a relief centre during a devastating bushfire. As chaplain, I made my way towards her. Sitting down, waiting, I offered her water, food, a cup of coffee... she said she was fine. She didn't look fine. Thinking that she had made her way in from some remote hermit hideaway with a hundred cats, I asked what her day had been like. Crazy, she said, I'm the local vet.

How often do we reduce people to a single, simple story that we make up about them, often related to their appearance? We hold on to that assumption, description, bias, or judgement, failing to see the person who is before us. Why then, are we surprised, when they have a whole other set of stories to tell us that don't fit into the box that we have put them in?

In today's reading from the book of Samuel, Jesse's son David had been overlooked in the line-up of his brothers. He was, after all, simply the youngest and was busy with looking after the sheep. So why would he be included in an important gathering such as this? On seeing Eliab, Samuel thinks his job is done, after all, he was probably tall, strong and good looking, but the Lord explains to Samuel in verse 7: "*Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*"

So, son after son is presented to Samuel, and in the end, they discover that they can't proceed until little David is called in from the fields. Yes, says the Lord to Samuel, anoint him. There's a quirky addition to the story here, that, even after the Lord has said that the Lord doesn't look on outward appearances, the text goes on to tell us that David "*was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome.*" This can be read as a strange kind of affirmation of the



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assumption that beauty is a blessing given by God to those chosen, which belongs to the dark and dangerous idea that physical impairment is somehow connected to the opposite of blessing. Now there's something to discuss!

We don't even get to know the name of the man in the middle of the story from John's gospel. He is simply known as 'the man born blind' or 'the man who was blind.' No wonder his neighbours couldn't recognise him after he was given sight if he was only ever identified or known by his incapacity. When his fear-filled parents are asked by the Pharisees, "Is this your son?" They respond with, "It looks like our son who was born blind. We don't know any more than that. Ask him." Without the blindness that he was known by, his whole identity is in question.

This rich and layered story is all about sin and suffering and punishment and prophets, and a refusal or inability from the religious leaders to see Jesus for who he is. The one who sees him is the one who was born blind. We don't often sit well with things we don't understand. When a situation strays out of our known and constructed worldview, we get fearful and try to explain it away. Theologian Will Willimon says of this story, that '*some new and uncontained power is loose here.*' That can be a frightening thing.

People are always more than their appearance and more complex than the simple stories we construct about them. The God who is revealed to us in Jesus is always more than we can ever contain, know or understand. Our task as followers is to be courageous, inviting the Light of the World to shine into our darkness, even and especially when we encounter something that challenges the way we see ourselves, each other and our tightly held constructions of church, faith and life.

All I know is, he said, that once I was blind and now I see.

### ***Singing - Amazing Grace TiS 129***

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### ***Offering***

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With grateful hearts we collect these tokens so we can share with others. We give thanks for all we have and we bring our gifts, the money, the time and talents, the creativity and imagination. We long to live a new way, a New Kingdom Way where all is shared around the table and people no longer live with want. Use what we offer to bring us more closely to your Kingdom Way and to share the good news of your love.

Amen and Amen

### ***Notices***

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March 16th is National Close the Gap Day - if you look online here:

<https://closethegap.org.au/close-the-gap-day/>

there are many ways to find information and get involved.

March 15-21 is Harmony Week and March 21 is Harmony Day. you can find out more here:

<https://www.harmony.gov.au>

### ***Prayers for World & Community***

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#### **The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want.**

But Lord, some people DO want. People are living on the edge of the economy. The rich are getting ridiculously rich but there are those on the edge who fear falling off the edge. What are you asking of me, of us? Lead us Lord. We pray for those on the edges of becoming homeless, those who have to make choices between food and rent and bills.

#### **He makes me lie down in green pastures.**

We think of those this night who have nowhere to lie in comfort, those on street corners or looking for somewhere of safety and shelter, those couch surfing or fleeing domestic violence, those picking their way through rubble. We think of those in our own towns and cities as well as those who are refugees looking for somewhere to lay their head, somewhere they can belong.

#### **He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.**



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We pray for those who are being led into places they do not wish to go. We pray for those experiencing troubled waters and turbulent times. Bring peace and gentle space for restoration and healing. We pray for those who are lonely or afraid.

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me.**

When the shadows we are experiencing are the dappled light of our own death or the death of others, when we know the shadow of grave illness of grief, bring the sureness of your presence. When the surrounding evil is addiction, or fear and anxiety we pray the rod and staff of your comfort. We pray healing and restoration and recovery. We pray right relationships and flourishing for our world.

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.**

We pray for those who struggle with disability and impairment. We pray for those who feel excluded and alone. We long for a table that truly includes all people. We seek flourishing and know that our own liberty is wrapped completely in the flourishing of each other. May our cup of blessing and of justice overflow.

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.**

We give thanks for your steadfast care of us, for the promises of your Light and Peace. By your grace and mercy keep us sure and strong through our days and bring us home in love.

### **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 - Be thou my vision TiS 547**

### **Blessing**

Live your life as children of light.

Seek justice and truth  
and every sort of goodness.

Be pleasing to the Lord in all you say and do.

And may the grace of God surround you  
this coming week and always.

*Liturgy: Rev. Deacon Wendy Elson*  
*Shearwater Ministry Team*

*Reflection & Editor:*  
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*Presbytery of Gippsland*





## Wild Fig Tree Lenten Resource - March 20-25, 2023

### Invitation

Throughout 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.

### Monday March 20th

*1 Samuel 16:11 Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."*

Light a candle for the smallest, the youngest, the ones 'left out' and not included. Who might that be? What might that be? When we only focus on who or what seems to be most important, we might miss the gentle ones quietly tending the flock and the whispers of the wilderness around us and within.

### Tuesday March 21st

David, the shepherd boy, was a most unlikely choice to be leader of God's people. Who are the young leaders you admire? Are there few or many? How are they seen and heard?

Greta Thunberg, the Swedish environmental activist, could easily have been overlooked. At age 15 she started spending her Fridays outside the Swedish Parliament campaigning for stronger action on climate change and has become a global leader.

Is there someone close to you who could be a future leader for the sake of the world? What can you do to include them in the conversation?

### Wednesday March 22nd

*Psalm 23: 1-3 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul,*

What does it look like to lie down in green pastures? How does it feel to submit to the tingling caress of the grass and remain beside the restorative stillness of the waters?

We are deep into Lent, it's time to stay still for a while, to cease from wandering, to notice where we are and where we have been. Draw it, paint it, write your poem ... you know this psalm maybe better than you know yourself.

### Thursday March 23rd

*Come and find the quiet center  
in the crowded life we lead,  
Find the room for hope to enter,  
find the frame where we are freed:  
Clear the chaos and the clutter,  
clear our eyes, that we can see  
All the things that really matter,  
be at peace, and simply be.*  
from "Come and find the quiet center"  
words: Shirley Erena Murray.

You can listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=to-6eiVwnlq>

Stay still in the quiet centre. Watch the clouds, a candle, the ocean or keep your eyes closed. Be at peace.

### Friday March 24th

*John 9:5-7 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.*

The whole environment; the dirt on the ground, the water in the pool and the spit in his mouth were all part of Jesus' healing ministry of touch. Sacred earth and water, within and around us. What part does the surroundings, the habitat play in your healing, health and wellbeing? Offer a prayer of thanks.

### Saturday March 25th

Listen

Presbytery of Gippsland

Rev. Jennie Gordon

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