



Sunday May 7th, 2023 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

God is our Rock and our Refuge.
A strong Fortress who saves.

God is our Pathway and Guide,
our Steadfast Lover and our Redeemer.

God is our Deliverer
and faithful one.

Whoever you are and whatever has brought you,
know that God longs and yearns for you,
dear and precious one.
God meets you here.

Light the candle - Christ is with us.

Acknowledging



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 380

Yours be the glory risen conquering Son

OR: Tis 636 God has spoken to his people Alleluia

Prayer



Do not let your hearts be troubled:

And yet so often we find ourselves going back over the conversations we have had and rehearsing the ones to come. We worry and we get anxious and stressed.

Believe in me: We put our faith in so many things other than you. Faith in our bank balance, faith in whatever drives our identity and our sense of ourselves. We hold our beliefs so tightly to ourselves and refuse to open ourselves to the possibilities of new revelations.

We know the way, yet we so often take the road well travelled lest we lose our way. Lead us into your paths to find your life and truth.

Into your hands we put our spirit O God, for you are the Faithful One who has promised to forgive us and restore us to right-relationship with You, with ourselves and with one another.

Beloved ones, precious ones, you are forgiven and restored. **Thanks be to God.**

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Readings: Acts 7:55-60 &
John 14:1-14

Reflecting - Rev. Deacon Marian Bisset

I was asked to offer a prayer at two local rural ANZAC services. The setting was early morning, a fog sitting below the gathered crowd, above the hills with the sun creeping through and over the fog. There was a quietness from the gathered crowd. At one of the services a historical newspaper article from 1921 was read highlighting the celebration of the war memorial built for the lives killed and the lives injured through fighting. At the second service stories were shared of the 66 young people who set off ready to respond, leaving the mountains and the stones, the river and the hills behind in exchange for a place of violence and trauma. 18



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were destined to a death by gunfire, slaughtered like lambs, legs like pieces of string. Stephen was led out to be slaughtered in an equally brutal and inhumane way for the belief that the leader he followed was right. Jesus promised a new way, a new life, a transformed existence both in life and in death. How could Stephen possibly have had the mental fortitude to ask God to not hold the murderers responsible for their actions? The psalmist promises God as a refuge, as a place of protection and place of safety, "In you, Womb of Life, I take refuge...be for me a rock of refuge, a stronghold to save me" (Ps. 31: 1-2) and later "in you I trust, Faithful God; I declare, 'You are my God'" (Ps. 31: 14)¹. Was this going to be the bit extra something which would give Stephen the belief that God would be forgiving to the murderers and offer mercy to them? We can only wonder.

I listened to the stories of these young men who signed up to the Defence Force, often in a group with their friends, excited and enthusiastic in the connectedness between them. As the reality sunk in and death and depravity became real in a way no person should understand, I wondered whether God was real to them at that moment.

We are not living in the time of Stephen, or the time of the young country men sent to fight war, but we are living in a time where there are atrocities being performed on people through violence and war. It is difficult to relate to the cries of despair by the Psalmist when we live in a country which enjoys peace.

Our own communities in which we live, work and play are not always easy places to inhabit and at other times they are the most wonderful places of connected relationships. Relationships are built, constructed, added to, reshaped and renewed. A healthy relationship is not a static state of being, it is fluid, adaptable, whose foundation has been built on the cornerstone of

¹ Wilda Gafney, *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church Year W*, (Church Publishing Incorporated: New York, 2021), 129.

Christ. We are all responsible to be the stones of refuge, to offer the shelter and the hospitality the Psalmist knew their God offered. We are the ones who build a house of multiple occupancy with the living stones of God, our hands.

We remember the men who left their homes and families and hold their stories up. Can we hold our own story up in the same way? Are we truly "people of God who have found mercy?" (1 Pt. 2:10)

Singing - TiS 468

We are your people Spirit of grace

OR: TiS 387 Christ is alive Let Christians sing

OR: TiS 683 God! When human bonds are broken

Offering

You have given us such great blessing, and in our thankfulness we share with others. Bring life and health through these gifts, we pray. Thanks for the gifts we find in one another. We think this day of those who are in need, for those without resources which are necessary to thrive. Give us generous and grateful hearts. **Amen.**

Notices

May 13 is World Fair Trade Day

Prayers for World & Community

Stone upon stone we build, living stones.

Build us into a spiritual home.

Rejected, 'unacceptable' and alone, yet chosen and precious in God's sight. This image of Jesus is reflected in so many around us in our community today. Build us into a home that includes all. Chosen and precious, may we not forget how loved we truly are.

Stone upon stone we build, living stones.

In the awareness that there are sick ones among



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us, in our families, our communities and our congregations. As we build, we bring our vulnerable ones to you. May the love and concern we have for these dear ones be our mortar which holds us all together.

Stone upon stone we build, living stones.

We bring to you our nation. It is easy to feel despair. We bring our leaders to you and ask that they show grace to each other and to their constituents, and may it flow back to them. May they make policy which cares for the least and the lost and holds the privileged accountable to care for others. We pray about those big decisions we make as a nation, for people deliberating about the Voice, for the listening and truth telling and covenant holding. **Stone upon stone we build, living stones.** May we build these stones to create structures which last, which shelter people and give comfort and rest. As we build our spiritual home, we think of those who have no literal home. Those literally homeless or at risk of it, those whose homes do not provide what they need to flourish and those who have lost their homes due to natural disasters, climate change, war and conflict or changing politics. We are in a housing pinch and many are suffering.

Stone upon stone we build, living stones.

We hear your call to us to be a home in our own neighbourhoods. May our churches truly reflect your character, your welcome, your shelter, your open hospitality and acceptance. We are your beloved, your chosen, your precious ones. May we have generous hearts and may we show kindness toward all those with whom we share our lives.

Cornerstone, central rock that gives us our structure and our form, our times are in your hands. May we take the risk to taste and see that you are good.

We pray together then as Jesus taught us:

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 624

Christ be my leader by night as by day

OR: TiS 687 God gives us a future

OR: TiS 666 We are marching in the light of God

Blessing

Stone upon stone keep building the house.
Stone upon stone keep walking the way.
Walk in the Truth and welcome the Life.
The one to whom you are precious
will keep and sustain you.
Go in peace to love and to serve.
Stone upon stone.
In the name of Christ.

*Reflection: Rev. Deacon Marian Bisset
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