



Sunday May 14th, 2023 **The Fig Tree Worship Resource**

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard (Ps 66)

Let us make a joyful noise to the Lord
Who has given us breath and life
And has kept our feet steady and strong.

Let us worship God.

Light the candle - Christ is with us.

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 152 Joyful joyful we adore you

OR: TiS 143, Immortal, invisible, God only wise
OR: TiS 217 Love divine all loves excelling
OR: TiS 182 Bring many names beautiful and good

Prayer



God of love and wonder,
As we look to the sky, the water, the land
And the web of creation,
We see your hand as Lord of heaven and earth
And everything in it.

As the apostle Paul proclaims:
In you we live and move and have our being.

Enliven our gathering today.
Encourage us in your word.
Enable us to be your people,
For the sake of the world.

We pray you enable and encourage us
Because we often struggle
to be fully alive in you.

And so we pray, forgive and restore us:

When we say we love you but
Are distracted from your ways.

When we feel alone or orphaned
and struggle to see your Spirit enlivening us.

When we struggle to see you
Just as the world struggles to see you.

Followers of Christ,
Hear his promise - that we are not alone
Jesus offers us the Advocate,
The Holy Spirit to be with us forever.

As Jesus lives,
we are loved and known,
and so we live in him.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Readings: Acts 17:22-31 &
John 14:15-21



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Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton

A priest working at Crown Casino recently claimed that luck has become a new religion. He had been observing large numbers of people gambling in the hope that they will win a large fortune. He noted that instead most lose devastating amounts of money, but continue to gamble. He believes that many people 'show an alarming lack of individual responsibility' and that many believe that 'luck is on their side.' He has concluded that "in our society luck has become a new secular deity."

This may or not be true. Some people, I believe, just gamble for the enjoyment, as a form of entertainment. They hope for a jackpot, but are not in any way worshipping anything whilst they gamble.

But clearly, there are some who are not there for the entertainment. And there is no doubt in my mind that the increasing prevalence of problem gambling in our community is very worrying, but whether it is due to worshipping luck is perhaps questionable. Certainly, gambling is extremely heavily and persuasively promoted, and increasingly normalised.

But some of the problem gambling, I would venture, arises from a feeling of desperation by those who are struggling to make ends meet and by those burdened with enormous debt levels with too large mortgages, credit card debt and the like. Gambling then becomes a misguided attempt to deal with problems.

And perhaps, rather than luck being worshipped, it might well be consumerism that is the god at whose altar many people are worshipping. This means that some people believe that they will be truly happy if they win a large enough amount of money to buy all that they desire. Certainly, it's not just in gambling behaviour that we see excesses, many people have extraordinary amounts of possessions and yet keep buying more. And shopping has

become, according to the consumer polls, Australia's favourite leisure activity, polling above sport and other leisure activities.

A news report that I saw on television suggested that more people went shopping on Easter Sunday than went to church. Now I'm not sure if that is accurate (how would they measure?), but nonetheless I think that lots of people look for meaning in consumerism and in other manifestations of modern life, like sport, hobbies, travel, work, and family life.

I wonder what St Paul would say if he visited Melbourne (or wherever you live), like he did Athens?

For when he visited Athens and addressed an audience at the Areopagus, he said, "I see that you Athenians are very religious." He said that because he could see shrines and stone idols all over the town. Apparently, there were hundreds of these shrines and idols. Would he have said that if he visited Melbourne (or where you live) today?

Well, no. He wouldn't have seen stone altars or idols of the type he saw in Athens, and on the other hand he would see substantial churches, but not a lot of people in them. So, I reckon he would have to conclude that at least in terms of formal religion, that Australians are not very religious. But then if he went to the football or the horse races or greyhounds or to Crown Casino or one of the big clubs, or to one of the shopping plazas that he'd have to conclude that although many Australians are not formally religious that some of them reserve their fervour and worship for other idols. Some people really do idolise football players, and some are fervent buyers of all the latest fashions or technology or latest fads.

Remember all the people who queue up overnight each time there is a release of a new form of technological gadget? They have to be the first to get the latest technology.



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In many ways, I think many Australians are like the Athenians whom he described as being very interested in finding out about and talking about the latest new ideas and things. Except that unlike the Athenians who were obsessed with new ideas and philosophies, many Australians seem to be obsessed with idolising people (footballers/ TV stars) or things (houses, cars, new technology, clothing, food and alcohol). Now this isn't everyone, by any means, but it is prevalent I believe.

Why might this be? And how can the church, taking its lead from Paul who tried very hard to find ways of connecting with people where they were at, how can the church find connecting points with those whose lives are focused this way?

If we take this seriously, it means that the church needs to ensure that it has a good understanding and empathy with the realities, dreams and aspirations of the community. It then needs to seek to find and try out new ways of connecting with children, families and adults, and to find new ways of sharing the Gospel. And in the process, needs to be prepared to fail and make mistakes and not always achieve the kind of results we aspire to reaching. We need to remember that even Paul, the great evangelist, was not always received kindly. Nor did his preaching always result in conversions.

In Athens, his audience were divided in their responses to him, but most were negative. But some were prepared to hear more from him, and a few became believers. It was not his most successful preaching assignment, but he faithfully fulfilled his calling to proclaim Jesus Christ.

We are likewise called to be faithful to our calling to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are reminded of this calling at every baptismal service when we read these words

from Matthew's Gospel, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

And as Jesus in today's reading from John's gospel reminds us, we do not do this by ourselves for we have One who will guide us in God's truth, the Holy Spirit.
Thanks be to God.

Singing - TIS 665 Jesus Christ is waiting

OR: TIS 398 Come down O Love divine
OR: TIS 590 What a Friend we have in Jesus

Offering

Holy Spirit, Advocate, Comforter, your breath is as close as each breath we take. As we breathe in and out we remember the truth that in Christ we live and move and have our being.

As you give us breath and life, may what we offer be as breathe and life to the whole of creation. Be our Advocate and enliven us to be advocates for others. Be our Comforter and enliven us to be comfort to others.

Bless these gifts, bless those who give, bless those who receive. Amen.

Notices

Today is *World Communications Day*.
May 18-28 is the
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.



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Prayers for World & Community

O Lord our God,
You hear our prayers before we speak,
And answer before we know our need.
Although we cannot pray as we ought,
May your Spirit pray in us,
Drawing us to you and towards our neighbours. ¹

We pray for our world, her land and waters, the
air we breathe, her peoples, first and second
nations, her flora and fauna. As we see your hand
in everything, equip us with wisdom and grace to
care for the whole of creation.

We recall things that threaten to overwhelm:

A warming climate;
Wars amongst nations;
Wars amongst communities;
Reduced capacity in churches;
Conflict within families ...

We pray for those who struggle:

Those who feel alone or orphaned;
Those who feel forgotten or unloved;
Those who face grief and loss...

O Lord our God,
You hear our prayers before we speak,
And answer before we know our need.
Although we cannot pray as we ought,
May your Spirit pray in us,
Drawing us to you and towards our neighbours.

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,

¹ Uniting in Worship II p 281

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 387

Christ is alive Let Christians sing

OR: *All Together OK 413* Will you come and follow me
OR: *All Together OK 313* Christ, be our light
OR: *TiS 412* God sends us the Spirit

Blessing

Breathe in ... breathe out.

The people of Israel used the word
Ruach for breath and
Ruach for Holy Spirit.

The Advocate, the Comforter, the Spirit
Is as close as every breath.

We are not alone,
So as we go from here
The Advocate is our breath,
As Christ is our life.

Go, to breathe love and life
Into all you do,
And are,
And are becoming
In the name of Christ.

The blessing of God goes with you:
Creator,
Life-giver,
Advocate. Amen.

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