



## **Sunday September 10th, 2023**

### **The Fig Tree Worship Resource**

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

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Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

#### **Call to Worship (UiW2 adapted)**

When we are parched: **God refreshes.**

When we are hungry: **God sustains.**

When we are naked: **God covers.**

When we are lost: **God finds.**

**O God, you are our God: we seek your face.**

Every thirst may be quenched in the waters of God.

**Every hunger may be fed at the table of God.**

Let us worship God.

*Light the candle - Christ is with us.*

#### **Acknowledging**

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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 - Jesus calls us here to meet him, TiS 477**

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OR: For the beauty of the earth, TiS 137

#### **Prayer**

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Ancient of Ages, provider of all,  
You are the One who formed us into community.  
You are the One who placed us into your creation.  
You are the One who gave us status as your beloved.  
You are the One who entrusted us to be custodians of your world.  
Quell our anxieties and help us to trust in you.  
Open our hearts and minds to your hopes for us.

Open our ears to hear the cries of our neighbours.

Give us voices to proclaim your justice.

When our relationships are fractured, You are the path to reconciliation.

When our connection with landscape is coated in bitumen and concrete,

You call us back into nature.

When we lack links with our local community, You show us the way to share Your love.

When we think we lack the resources to share Your love, You remind us that we are enough.

Gracious and Loving God, source of life and goodness,

You know our failings and love us all the more.

In confidence of your great compassion for us

We confess that we are caught up in death's ways.

If we inadvertently support companies which prosper on slave labour, forgive us.

If we knowingly benefit from burning gas and petroleum products, forgive us.

If our actions are motivated by fear, forgive us.

If our inactions are motivated by selfishness, forgive us.

Teach us and equip us Generous God to be your people,

to be authentic to our true selves, as you made us and loved us.

We pray in the name of Jesus, the Reconciler and Prince of Peace. 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: Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 149

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 18:15-20

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

*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.*



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### Reflecting -

Perhaps this reflection needs a trigger warning! We are talking here about blood. Perhaps you are a blood donor. To those who are willing and able to donate blood, what a precious gift you give those who need it. For many ancient societies, blood equalled life because it contained the essence of life itself. So when you donate blood you are truly giving life.

*'When I see the mark of God, I will pass over you.'*  
The Israelites are to remember and celebrate this as the day of deliverance and hope in perpetuity.

I sometimes feel a little squeamish about all the images of blood that we use in our faith story and I think it is important to unpack them carefully. The Israelites in the Exodus would be saved by this mark, the symbol of the blood. They were to be ready and prepared for the journey and the experience of exile. This special mark of God, would be the sign to Pass Over this particular house and spare it from death and destruction. How easily we gloss past the fact that death passed over some but onto others who were not spared the loss of their precious firstborns. Let's hold this story for a moment.

Romans tells us *'Let love be your only debt'*. All the commandments equal this one thing. This is what heralds the dawn of a new day. Let this be your *'raison d'être'*, your whole reason for being and your purpose in life. As then as I look at the passage in Matthew, I can see that it is showing us what this might look like in real life. You may be hurt by someone but ultimately everyone is just doing the best that they can. If you have an issue with someone here is how we go about being reconciled. (I nearly wrote "solving the problem" but the point is that people are not really a problem to be solved!)

And here is the line that stood out to me like it never has before. If you are unable to find a way to forgive/resolve differences/ heal wounds, through discussion with them, treat them as you would treat a GENTILE and a TAX COLLECTOR!!!

What a statement eh?! Whatever is loosed here is also loosed in heaven. *'Whatever is loosed'* implies

an image of Liberation. What things do we liberate, Mercy, Justice, Kindness? I am left with the uncomfortable question about how I should treat a Gentile or a tax collector, how I might liberate them and myself. (In our day perhaps think of someone who is completely 'other'.....perhaps they vote a different way to you or have a different religion or whatever). Because Jesus has gone and confused the issue by welcoming sinners and eating with them. So it seems to me that the debt of love I owe is to people I especially have a struggle in loving.

And so to Exodus again... when we think of the mark of blood which is the hope of salvation, it reminds us of the Eucharistic blood. The blood of Jesus shed for me, which I now share at the table around which we are all gathered, this is the blood that unites us. Space there for everyone! As the body of Christ, the community of the faithful, we share together in the body of Christ, in the hope of liberation.

I hold a particular statement very dear to my heart about the blood of the streets and the blood in our chalices, our communion cups, being the same (see below). The blood of violence and death, the blood of fear and suffering and pain, alongside the blood of the faithful and faith-filled ones. Our communion liturgy sometimes refers to the elements as the Cup of Hope and Liberation, and the Bread of Life. This is when we share in the broken-ness of the body of Christ, the broken-ness of one another.

If we take this seriously, we know that our debt is to live the same way as Jesus. Love, pure love, where we take seriously living together in a way where we reflect the love of God, where we radiate it out to our world. Gentiles and tax collectors clearly had not been held up as prime figures in the Kingdom of God. Yet where did Jesus focus his energies? Certainly he put a lot of focus on caring for these fringe dwellers and asking us to do so too.

So think of those you dislike, you owe them a debt! And together, lets beat down a path between the altar and the gutter. In the power of love.



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*We will know when we have  
enough deacons when,  
All the needs of the marginalised  
and vulnerable are met;  
To gather the gifts of the church  
and take them to the world,  
And to gather the needs of the world  
and bring them to the church,  
has become a habit;*

*"...Deacons, going back and forth,  
have worn down the boundary lines  
that we use to keep church and world  
separated...";*

*Deacons, leading the baptised in and out,  
Have beaten down a path between  
the altar and the gutter  
So that everyone will see the link  
between the Blood in our chalices  
and the blood in our streets;*

*All All people respond  
to the challenge to live,  
Not in the love of power but  
in the power of love..*

**Rev Irma Wyman**

### ***Singing - We are your people, TiS 468***

OR: Father in heaven, TiS 465

### ***Offering***

**Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation,  
Through your goodness we have these gifts to  
share.**

**Accept and use our offerings for your glory  
and for the service of your kingdom.**

**Blessed be God for ever. Amen  
(PBA p.27)**

### ***Notices***

**Today is World Suicide Prevention Day**

[World Suicide Prevention Day: 10 September](#)

**September 14th is R U OK? Day.** It's our national day of action when we remind Australians that every day is the day to ask, 'are you OK?' and start a meaningful conversation whenever they spot the signs that someone they care about might be struggling with life. R U OK? will release resources, tips and ideas to help you drive genuine change in your workplace, school and community.

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

God of the Mountaintops,

We pray for people whose lives are not rock-solid in you.

For any who are suspicious of you,

For any who distrust you,

For people hidden in shadows

and for people who are tired of being in the spotlights

Creator God, **Let Your love flow.**

God of the Saddles,

We pray for people who are in some in-between times,

For any who are coming to the end of their schooling,

For any who are about to become parents,

For people who are close to retiring,

and for people who are transitioning from independent living into supported accommodation.

Creator God, **Let Your love flow.**

God of the Valleys,

We pray for all your people blessed to live in your fertile lands.

We pray that as a community we can find ways to live peaceably and sustainably,

For nations to be at peace with one another, so that crops can be planted and people fed,

For governments to lead with wisdom and compassion

For gaps in health and education to be closed forever,

Creator God, **Let Your love flow.**



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God of the Caves,  
We pray for your people who are in a dark place,  
For people grieving the death of a loved-one,  
For people confused or distressed about their  
identity,  
For your children entrapped in debt or poverty,  
For any of us struggling with mental health  
concerns or spiritual crisis,  
Creator God, **Let Your love flow.**

Let your love flow over all your lands  
Let your love flow in us and through us  
for the sake of Your beloved  
in the name of the One Christ who lived, died  
and raised as One with You and the Spirit,  
Amen.

We pray together then as Jesus taught us:

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

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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 - Brother, sister, let me serve you*** ***TiS 650***

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OR: Kneels at the feet of his friends, TiS 640

### ***Blessing***

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When we are called:

**God sends us**

When we are broken:

**God sends us as healers**

When we are voiceless:

**God gives us a voice to proclaim Good News**

When we are ordinary:

**God gives us extraordinary stories to tell**

**We go in the power of God's love**

**Amen.**

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*Editor's note:*

The attributions for the 20 August were incorrect and  
should have been:

*Reflection:* Rev. Karen Eller; *Liturgy:* Rev. Wendy Elson

