



## **Sunday November 12th, 2023**

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

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

*Psalms 78:1-4*

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

**I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.**

We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.

*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 - Bring many names (TiS 182)**

OR: God has spoken to his people Alleluia TiS 636

#### **Prayer**



Come to us O God of surprising grace.  
Break into the places in our lives  
Which we think are not worthy of your entry, and  
show us the measure of your love for us.  
Break through into newness  
In all our life together, O God,  
In the wonder of your transforming presence.  
*(from Uniting in Worship 2193)*

Loving God,  
We come to you in this season of newness,  
We see the freshness of plants, in the warmth  
and after rain.  
May we be renewed,  
Move from places of darkness and winter into  
light.  
We ask that you will take from us that which is  
dark  
Forgive us for unloving feelings  
To those who are different, in origins, attitudes,  
looks, age, anything we find hard to love.  
Forgive us for thinking of ourselves first, for  
reacting in anger or disrespect, for wanting more  
instead of what we need.  
Forgive us for making and worshipping other  
gods, for forgetting who you are and what you  
have done for us.  
Loving, gracious, merciful God, we offer ourselves  
to you in humility. Amen

Let us remember that through Christ, we are a  
loved and forgiven people.  
**Amen**

#### **Passing the peace**

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

#### **Listening**

Read: Psalms 78:1-7;  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 &  
Matthew 25:1-13

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

#### **Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton**

When I travelled in Scandinavia years ago, I  
visited a folk museum in rural Norway where  
there were old houses and farm buildings and  
machinery and crafts, etc. from all over Norway.  
It was like a Norwegian version of Sovereign Hill

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in that there were costumed people re-creating the rural life of previous centuries.

As well as this, there were galleries dedicated to collections of household goods, tools, weapons, and art works. One of these was devoted to the embroideries and tapestries that were sewn in the evenings and through the long dark winter when often it was too cold and dark to work outside. Typically, young women would have had a carved wooden chest, often with a tapestry on the lid, to hold their trousseau. As well as that, tapestries were often used as wall decorations. These tapestries frequently featured illustrations on Biblical stories, and the most commonly illustrated Biblical story was the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids.

Our guide explained that this was because the winters in northern and western Norway were often very long and harsh, and in days gone by often farm houses were cut off from the outside world for many months. This meant that the people who lived there had always needed to be well prepared for the long winter, which could come early and suddenly. Sometimes the summer would be very brief and the window of opportunity to grow food, make preserves and cheese, dry fish or meat, etc. limited.

Failure by people in these remote areas to gather in enough of everything they needed for themselves and their animals for the long winter might well cost them their lives. So the message from the parable of always being ready and prepared resonated strongly with these rural folk. Clearly they made sure that it was passed on to their young folk, and teaching them Biblical stories like this one was one of the ways in which they did this.

But clearly in the parable the message is more than just the necessity of being ready or being

prepared, because the parable revolves around being ready for a specific event, which is the arrival of the bridegroom.

So who is this bridegroom, and what is it that we will miss if we are not ready, not prepared for his arrival? Well, already in Matthew's Gospel Jesus has referred to himself as the bridegroom (9:15), so that's a pretty strong hint, and he's also told parables about how God's Kingdom is like a king throwing a wedding feast for his son. This reinforces the notion that Jesus is the bridegroom and the wedding has something to do with the coming into being of God's Kingdom.

Therefore, it seems very likely that in our parable the bridegroom is Jesus, the occasion is his second coming, and the bridesmaids are his followers, including us, who are called to live faithfully whilst they (and we) await the day of his return. The parable, and the stories and teachings around it, also make clear that there is no way that we can know when Jesus will return, so we are called to live faithfully in the present, and not waste our time worrying or speculating on when that return will take place.

We are not to be complacent thinking that we can put off living faithfully until a later date, because although in this parable the bridegroom was delayed, in the previous parable the master arrived unexpectedly early catching the wicked slave out misbehaving. And realistically we also do not know how long we shall live, so we can also be caught out dying before our expected span of life is reached.

Light is always seen as a positive attribute in the Gospels. Jesus, after all, said, "I am the Light of the world."

And he also said, (13:43) "The righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father."



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So, it has been suggested that the light of the lit lanterns symbolise good deeds done in response to God's love and salvation. Jesus, after all, exhorted his disciples (in 5:14-16), "Let your light shine before men and women that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." The light that Jesus wanted his disciples to shine was for them to live righteously, justly, with mercy and forgiveness, with generosity, faith, hope, peace and love.

So let us be people who are truly wise, and not foolish. Let us shine the light of God's love into the darkness of this world as we await the day of His coming. Amen.

#### ***Singing - When he comes back (TiS 280)***

OR: Longing for light we wait in darkness  
(As one Voice 2-003 or All Together OK 313)

#### ***Offering***

Knowing that each member of Christ's body contributes to the whole, we bring our gifts as we share in the unity and diversity of Christ.

**Amen**

*(from Uniting in Worship 2 270)*

#### ***Notices***

Yesterday (November 11) was Armistice Day, also known as Remembrance Day. It marks the end of fighting on the Western Front in 1918.

November 20 is World Children's Day.

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

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Loving Lord,

We come to you as the land where the stories of our faith is torn apart. We pray for the people who live there now, the little people who are forgotten as leaders allow weapons of destruction to be released.

We pray for those who have lost homes,  
Who have lost basic essentials, food and water  
And live in fear.

We pray for those who have been injured  
And who have lost those they love and rely on.  
We ask your presence with those who desperately try to help, courage as they face the danger of war.

And we pray for peace, we may not see a way forward but we trust in you, the creator.  
We pray for the leaders of our country that they may not argue over who is right but seek peace.

We pray for our world, your creation that we may care for it.

We pray for those affected by fires  
May we continue to do what is needed to protect the natural environment, may our leaders make wise decisions in the face of climate change.  
May we all care for all that we have been given.

We pray for our church in a time of change:  
For those who prepare for Synod,  
organisers and attendees  
For our presbytery and our churches.

We pray for our communities:  
for those who are ill, who need care and  
for those who provide care,  
for those who are hurting, grieving,  
anxious,  
we name those we know and care for....

We pray together then as Jesus taught us:



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#### **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.

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#### **Singing - God gives us a future (TiS 687)**

OR: Take my life and let it be (TiS 599)

#### **Blessing**

Wherever we go,  
May the joy of God the gracious  
Be with us.  
Wherever we go,  
May the face of Christ the kindly  
Be with us.  
Wherever we go,  
May the compassing of the Spirit of grace  
Be with us.  
Wherever we go,  
The presence of the trinity around us  
To bless and keep us.  
Amen

*from The Pattern of our Days edited by  
Kathy Galloway p171*