



Advent 2 - Sunday December 10th, 2023

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

We are using the **Watery Advent Wreath Liturgy** through Advent. For an explanation please see *The Fig Tree Resource for Advent 1*. If you would like to use candles you can find some liturgies online and here: <https://uniting.church/engage-together-advent-resource-out-now/>
* Remember to empty the water vessels after each Sunday, so the water stays fresh.

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

One: The Spirit is here
All: **God's peace is with us**

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 - Love divine, ... TiS 217

OR: O breath of life TiS 409

Prayer



If you have sourced the water from somewhere significant, let people know.

One: As we pour the water for our Advent wreath, first into the vessel for hope, (pause as the water pours)

and now into the vessel for peace, we remember our deep thirst for peace.

ALL: We long for your peace, O God.

One: The peace of a long soak in a hot tub after a hard day's work.

ALL: We long for your peace, O God.

One: The peace of steam rising around a home saved by the sweat and sacrifice of a community of firefighters and their supporters.

ALL: We long for your peace, O God.

One: Peace as deep and mysterious and teeming with life as the vast oceans.

ALL: We long for your peace, O God.

One: I invite you to name people and places that are in particular need of God's peace at this time:

between neighbours who disagree
those involved with the Family Court
In Afghanistan In Iraq In Darfur..
In Israel and Palestine, and elsewhere
victims of crime
those living with grief
those facing medical procedures

One: Advent God,
we worship you with peace.

ALL: We long for your peace, O God.

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11

For these words of faith
and for Jesus the Word

Thanks be to God.



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Reflecting - Rev'd Ian Brown

"preparing for peace"

Have you thought about what you do when you need comforting? Is there a place you go, a song or a memory you return to, a person you seek out, a walk you take?

"Comfort, comfort my people, speak tenderly to Jerusalem." Isaiah's people in exile were in dire need of comfort. Terrible, isn't it, what's happening there at the moment. Many of Jerusalem's diverse inhabitants and their neighbours are going to need more of this comfort, comfort - again!

There's been a huge amount of division and nonsense spoken about this one contested city, so let's start with some verifiable history. Originally Jerusalem was a Canaanite city. It's been under Jewish rule, and then Babylonian, Syrian, Greek and Roman power. All Jews were expelled when the city was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD by Vespasian. So, a Roman province, then a Muslim one under the Ottomans, with a Christian presence after the 'crusades'. It was like this until the end of the First World War.

The Jewish state of Israel began in 1949. You will know much of the story from there. Israel has the support of wealthy countries and donors. They have used force to push the indigenous owners of the land out of their homes, off their farms, oppressing non-Jewish inhabitants and importing Jewish ones to settlements on other people's land. Jerusalem and its people have suffered terrorism, yes, but they are the oppressors in this contested space.

For Isaiah's people, two and a half thousand years ago, the majority were feeling rejected by God. They had failed as a nation. They were exiles without even a place to belong, looking for the hope of a new peace. Isaiah writes to people whose faith is surviving in the toughest environment, in a spiritual desert.

So, when we read the poetry of the valleys being lifted up and the mountains made low, it's meant as an inspiration to faith. Faith that the dry seeds of hope that Israel had for peace and healing

may soon blossom. It's a poetic metaphor, for a flourishing return from exile; a new beginning. As much as anything, Isaiah addresses a spiritual wilderness, of people feeling lost and directionless, souls parched, and hope dried out. Into this wilderness, Isaiah speaks of preparation, a poem on the art of readiness. It might inspire us to think about how we prepare for a wholesome peace in our time.

The preparation Isaiah envisages is not minor. He doesn't mean the sort of tree trimming, present buying preparations we do for Christmas.

"A voice cries out: "In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord". Flatten the mountains, lift the valleys, straighten the roads - he saw that all this change, hope and new beginning would come with God's new age.

Mostly now, in our western, post-Christian culture, we prepare for the coming of Santa. We go along with the myth of the jolly red gent from the north pole, with flying reindeer and a sack.

Somehow, Isaiah was called to speak a new reality into being. "Speak to Jerusalem, cry out" - these are his instructions - proclaim, tell the good news because God is coming. Life was tough, but hope would be renewed.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. The Lord will lead his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms. A pastoral image. A loving shepherd carrying the lambs in his arms. Words of comforting hope addressed to people without home, without rights, without security - a people suffering and on the verge of losing their identity as a people. To them he begins to speak a new peace into existence.

Isaiah's people needed comfort and reassurance that even when the powerful oppressed their people, hope remains; the realities of God's compassionate love are unchanged.

Isaiah's words, "comfort, comfort my people" speak to us in a way they haven't for generations. We have a widespread loss of faith and many who feel despair. Too much that goes on seems to be preparing for war, not peace. And in the face of stark, harsh reality, 'a voice cries out



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in the wilderness, prepare!' The poor of our time are still oppressed.

In our culture many think it will be good for the less powerful to have fewer rights, while CEO's rake in millions. In our counter cultural faith, we have an ancient tradition that says, our world needs new hope.

This is the season that reminds us to renew our hope. To listen for the voice crying in the wilderness is our mission for Advent! And we can take comfort from God speaking tenderly to us and all in need of comfort.

Isaiah was bold enough to proclaim that God was present with his people in their exile and that God could make a difference to a people who were literally hopeless.

May God open the eyes of our faith, and strengthen our service, so our speaking and our doing might grasp a part of that new hope, that it may be born and grow in us and through us, bring new hope of peace in our too often hopeless world. Amen.

Singing - Comfort, comfort TiS 647

OR: On Jordan's bank, TiS 270

Offering

We bring these gifts to you and ask you to bless them, God of peace. Bless them and bless us so that your peace may find its way to the places where it is most needed and most welcome. In Jesus' name Amen.

Notices

Who in your community needs a message of comfort at this time? Will you hold a Blue Christmas service this year? How might you reach out to those in your community who are finding this time of year particularly tough?

Prayers for World & Community

God who breaks into a troubled world with the peace of Jesus Christ, be near all who need your comfort.

For those living in exile, lost, forgotten, or dismissed through indifference; for those traumatised by war and violence, may your comfort be known.

God of peace revealed in Jesus Christ, be a comforting presence to distressed places like the Gaza strip. Help us learn from a history of contested spaces, that we might see your peace breaking in.

God of comfort, comfort those who live in despair, those who have lost faith in leaders, countries, communities, family or even in themselves. Where hope seems dry as a desert, draw us towards your living water; as we find our thirst quenched, show us ways to share your living water in thirst-quenching ways.

Advent God, speak to your church as we struggle to know our place in our towns and country. Bring peace to us amidst our divisions; be comfort in our distress; renew us through your inbreaking presence.

We pray for places of drought and flood; places impacted by recent supercell storms. We pray for those heading towards Christmas deep in grief or loneliness. Help us be comfort and peace to those in need of your hope this season.

(time for silent prayer)

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,



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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 - O breath of life TiS 409

OR: O day of God draw near TiS 616, try tune: St THOMAS TiS 271

Blessing

Comfort, comfort, all my people

Companion God,
be beside us with your strength,
so we might meet others
with kindness and compassion
bringing the blessing of peace.

Siblings in Christ,
Go knowing that you are loved,
and live like you believe it.
In the name of the Holy
One in Three
Three in One.
Amen.

Watery Advent Blessing Song

Tune: NOEL NOUVELET TiS 665

Living water flowing,
'cross the dusty plains
thirsty landscapes bursting
with new life again.

Come, Jesus, come and
quench our longing too.
Let the peace of Advent,
flow through us, from you.

Watery Advent Wreath:

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