



## ***Sunday January 28th, 2024***

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

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

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Praise the Lord!

Let us give thanks to the Lord  
with our whole hearts.

Let us give praise in the company  
of the congregation.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We come to delight in God,  
to study God's works and  
to delight in them.

THE LIGHT HAS COME.

*Light the candle - Christ is with us.*

*(the call to worship and much of the liturgy  
is based on Psalm 111)*

#### ***Acknowledging***

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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 - Praise with joy TiS 179***

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OR: God himself is present TiS 121  
OR: Joy to the world TiS 268

#### ***Prayer***

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*(ask various people from around the congregation to take a  
turn at the response so it does not become monotonous!)*

God whose name is hallowed and holy,  
We are loved and forgiven,  
**your promise is sure.**  
When we cause others to flounder and fall,  
**forgive us Lord.**  
When we claim to speak for you  
in words you would not speak,  
**forgive us Lord.**

When we are false in the way we represent you,  
**forgive us Lord.**

When we are overwhelmed by the task of loving,  
**forgive us Lord.**

Great are your works O God.  
Ever mindful of love's covenant call on our lives,  
**we turn again to you.**

Gracious and merciful God,  
**you send us redemption.**  
Just as you offer us forgiveness,  
**help us to forgive ourselves and each other.**  
You know us, you love us, and you forgive us.  
**Thanks be to God.**

#### ***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: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 &  
Mark 1:21-28

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



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#### ***Reflecting - Rev. Arnie Wierenga***

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Often the apostle Paul seems to get tied up in knots trying to navigate the early Christian community. He says, “if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.” It’s a great sentiment no doubt, and was a response to an issue he could see, but we might wonder how to live if we are always trying not to offend others ...

One summer I was enjoying a beer with a Methodist pastor from the Pacific islands. It was quiet and away from the gaze of his family and church community. While he was glad that Methodist missionaries introduced the gospel to his country, he lamented aspects of culture that came with it. In this case, it was the inherited idea that any drinking (of alcohol) is bad. It did not translate well into his Pacific culture. It did make sense in early industrial England though. It was a time of dramatic social upheaval. Families were leaving the country for cities looking for work. Many men found themselves lost – unemployed and with a lessened sense of identity and confidence. They often found solace in the ale houses, drinking themselves senseless and coming home angry at the world. Alongside violence, many women and children experienced poverty and hunger. It was into this context that the temperance movement was born. It was seen as addressing an issue of care and justice. Rightly, many churches adopted temperance as part of their pastoral care. I love that our church is committed to justice issues. It is a key reason I belong to the Uniting Church. But times change. While drinking alcohol can still be a problem for many, our focus has shifted towards issues of climate justice, online gambling and poker machines – that rip the heart out of many families.

Over time our responses to issues can become codified and therefore inflexible. We continue to practise long after the why of it has been forgotten. Methodist teetotalism was exported across the world with their missionaries. My Methodist pastor friend felt he could only have that drink in private, regardless of the significant

time and geographical distance from early industrial England. Others in his community did not understand the history or reasons behind what missionaries delivered them in the name of Christ.

I grew up in a church community that was comfortable with serving fermented wine for Holy Communion. I married into a Methodist family where some members continue to ‘tee-totally’ abstain from fermented drinks. And while I’m not aware of any members of my current congregations struggling with alcohol, that doesn’t mean it is not an issue. It’s hardly the first thing any of us would like to admit to – that we have an addiction to alcohol, drugs, online shopping, poker machines or whatever... If our churches are truly open to any who might wander in through our doors, how does our welcome ensure that the love of Christ is what they encounter?

While the apostle Paul often gets tied up in knots, it seems on this one he is pretty clear. Love builds up, he says. It might be ok to eat meat that has been offered to idols if you don’t believe in idols, but not all will find it that simple. It might be easy to enjoy a glass of wine if it’s not needed to numb whatever ails, but not all will find it that simple. While many things are permissible as people who follow Jesus, not everything is helpful. And this is particularly so in context.

Paul puts people and relationships above most things. Whatever freedoms we have need to be understood in terms of community and relationships. Love becomes the moderator of our life and living. It seems to me this is an extension of the great commandment:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’ (Mark 12:30-31)

If we claim to follow Jesus, we are called into love. Love God with the entirety of our being.



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And express that love in our relationships with others.

Love does have a context. It is not abstract. That quiet drink with my friend may not have been harmful but that will not be so in every situation. And it's not just about what we eat and drink, but how we speak to each other, how we consider the impact of our presence upon others. The key for Paul is that love for others drives our behaviour. We need to be generous, informed, and sensitive to the needs and frailties of others (including ourselves).

As he states so simply and clearly: in the name of Christ 'love builds up'.

#### ***Singing - Brother, sister let me serve you***

##### ***TiS 650***

OR: God of Grace and God of Glory TiS 611

OR: In our darkness TiS 725

#### ***Offering***

You are the Christ, the Wise one.

We give thanks for all you grant to us in your wisdom and grace. We give thanks that you hold us in times of pain.

May we give freely, just as you have generously given to us. May your Kingdom come and your will be done.

And may it begin in us. Amen.

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

*(Suggestion is that random other readers do the lines that start with "bless", and that a pause is left between these, perhaps a taper lit in the pause).*

Dear ones, You are the light of the world, representatives of Divine Light. We gather in prayer for one another and for our world. Let us share the Light in all we do and say.

God of Light, God of surprises and 'Aha!' moments, God of reversals, God of our topsy-turvy world.

God of Grace, bring justice and peace. Holy and awesome is your name.

The Psalm says that the works of your hands are faithful and just. We too, are the works of your hands, may we be faithful and just also.

The Psalm speaks of the provision of food. Give us this day our daily bread. And let us be bread to nourish others.

*bless those with no bread...*

*bless those with no love...*

*bless our enemies...*

*bless our neighbours...*

*bless our leaders...*

*bless our friends and family...*

*bless our wider community...*

*bless our dear ones...*

And may we be a blessing to all those around us. Bring comfort, bring peace.

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 - O Christ the healer TiS 638***

OR: Lord Jesus we belong to you TiS 686



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#### ***Sending & Blessing***

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The Bible tells us that anyone who loves God is known by God.

Go out now, to know God and to make God known in your living. Use words when they are needed.

Delight in the works of God and bask in the honour and majesty of them.

And may the God of grace and mercy surround and embrace you.

In the name of the Christ. Amen.

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