



First Sunday in Lent, February 18th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

First Sunday in Lent: The Rainbow Covenant -

Leader: We come, trusting in God's mercy and love, longing to learn more about God's ways.

ALL: We come to be guided in the ways of God's truth - to experience the joy of God's salvation.

Leader: We come, at the beginning of our Lenten journey, aware of God's steadfast love helping us to navigate life's trials and temptations.

ALL: Lead us O God to do what is right and teach us to follow the humble way of Christ, your Son, our crucified and risen Lord.

Light the candle - Christ is with us.

Prayer

God, known as love,
seen in beauty and felt as near;
your wholesome care
is like the sun and the rain,
falling on us all alike.
Your inclusive grace
stretches out in rainbow diversity
covering your whole creation with promise. So as
light through water
refracts into bright colour
may your love shine through us,
through our worship
and our helpful action
to extend the reach of your rainbow love. Amen

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

As we gather, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these unceded land and 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 - Lord, your almighty word TiS 447

OR: **New words - Old tune:** Shades of Purple, shades of blue
- to the tune of DIX - (for the beauty of the earth)

http://www.carolynshymns.com/shades_of_purple_shades_of_blue.html

Listening

Read: Psalm 25: 1-10

PSALM REFLECTION

Rev. Ian Brown's reflective videoclip available at:

<http://tinyurl.com/262x2fp3>



Prayer

God, our source and our purpose,
energy and wisdom behind all creation,
God of storms and rainbows,
God of rain and sunshine,
God of all creation
we worship and adore you.

Like Noah and his family,
we praise you for the sign of your love stretched
in the sky for all.
For your care for the whole creation
and for your promise to preserve
and not destroy life.



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And at Jesus' baptism,
the sky again revealed your love
when you identified him as your beloved Son,
strengthening him with the same Spirit
who empowers and strengthens each of us.
For all these assurances of your love for us and
for the whole creation,
we praise and worship you.

Gracious God,
as we begin our Lenten journey,
and reflect on what our discipleship means for
our daily living,
we come to this point
recognising that we do want to follow Jesus, but
we recognise that we have often failed:

we confess our reluctance
to face the confrontation with ourselves,
the challenging issues and temptation
that the journey of following Christ
might hold for us.

We confess that
we are sometimes tempted
to wish for miracles
which would make life easier
rather than more stressful.

We admire
the difficult and risky journey that Jesus took,
challenging systems
which put conditions on God's love,
but confess
that we want our journeys of faith
to be devout but not too daring;
comfortable and not too threatening.

We cherish
the faithfulness and humility of Jesus,
yet we confess our fear
of walking Jesus' way of obedience
- the way of the cross.

Loving Jesus, save us from the time of trial,
deliver us from evil and forgive us our sins. Fill us
with your joy and peace

and strengthen us during this Lenten season to
follow you
wherever you choose to take us.

Friends, we are secure
in the healing, saving love of God,
So hear the good news;
in Christ Jesus, our sins are forgiven!
Thanks be to God! Amen

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Mark 1:9-15

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

Reflecting - Rev. Arnie Wierenga

I've just started to watch another of the many
series of reality show 'Alone'. For those
unfamiliar, ten or so people are dropped in a
remote wilderness with just a few survival items,
and attempt to stay as long as possible
completely isolated from all the usual supports of
food, shelter and kin.

After Jesus is baptised by John in the Jordan, we
hear that the Spirit drives him into the
wilderness. The gospel states succinctly, "He was
in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by
Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the
angels waited on him."

If you have tapped into the intrigue of 'Alone',
you will know that forty days is quite a feat. Time
of isolation and vulnerability does lead people to
be tempted and taunted and fear the beasts.

We are led to see that this wilderness time is a
time of preparation for Jesus. The sequence is
telling. Jesus is baptised, the Spirit descends upon



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him, a voice from the heavens claims him as beloved kin and then he's off to the wilderness. Forty days seems an echo of the forty years that Israel wandered through the wilderness, an allusion to Jesus guiding people now to the promises of God. And then it begins, the time is fulfilled, Jesus commences his ministry as one who brings the kingdom of God near to us. Good news!

I wonder if today we need wilderness times more than ever. One of the attractions of 'Alone' is that people unplug from all the complexity and noise of our human world. No phones, no dinner parties, no watching shows like 'Alone' while eating comfort food – but a rare opportunity to reset, re-evaluate, to remember what has value and to listen in the spaces.

During Lent many people find ways to embark on a 'wilderness journey'. Many will be familiar with giving something up for Lent, as a discipline to live more simply and reminder of things important. Others may actively embark on something new such as walking and noticing. If this passage from Mark's gospel is any guide, it suggests that wilderness time is important to prepare and shape us on this ministry journey.

I don't feel inclined towards the extreme 'Alone' experience, but I know the myriad of daily messages, emails, things to do, hopes, expectations and noise of the world can distract me from things more fundamental in life. As Jesus is baptised, he is claimed as God's beloved son. As we are baptised, it can be easy to forget that we too belong as kin to God and are loved.

Those that survive longest 'Alone' seem to have strength in two key ways: they have a kinship to their environment; they also have a strong sense of kin – those who love them and will be there when they return. The good news of Jesus Christ comes as relationship, an invitation to know God through him, and invitation to belong to God, to know how much God loves us. I see that as the most amazing and most important thing in my life. To see that God reaches out to us until we

understand we are known and loved is beyond words.

Perhaps that is why wilderness is so valuable. It strips back all the noise and unnecessary things and humbles us back to basics. I'm sure there are temptations in these spaces to find the easy life and accumulate all those things that promise us comfort. But if we stick long enough with the source of life and love, it will show us that, like Jesus, we are beloved siblings of God. It will help us understand what can be beyond words to understand: that God knows us and loves us.

That's good reason to come back from the wilderness, because that is good news to share!

Singing - What a friend we have in Jesus ***TiS 590***

OR: In water we grow TiS 494

Offering

As part of the covenant, we continue to offer our lives back to you, God of all. Bless us, and bless the gifts we bring, so that your purposes may blossom and come to fruitfulness for the sake of the world you love. Amen.

Notices

Feb 20th is World Day of Social Justice (shouldn't that be every day?)

St John's Uniting Church, Cowes, are offering an **online Lenten Study** this year via Zoom for five **Wednesday evenings from 8-9pm commencing on Feb 21st**. We will be inviting the Psalms to accompany us through the wilderness, with encouragement to respond creatively, through music, poetry, painting or... If you would like to find out more, or to book in, please email Jennie on revjenniegordon@gmail.com



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Prayers for World & Community

Loving, Creating God,
you are in covenant with all your people.
You pledge to be our God
and ask us to be your people, trusting in you. But
when it comes to embarking
on a tough fork in the road,
our time constraints and weak commitment hold
us back.
Help us be ready for the journey;
replace the fear in our hearts
with a sense of joy
and a challenge of discipleship.
Remind us that in service to you,
in helping others,
we will also find ourselves made more whole. So
help us lose our lives
in praying and working
for peace and for justice.
Help us to take up the cross
of following Jesus way,
where ever it may lead us.

We pray for all who feel left out,
or pushed out on purpose;
give us a generous measure
of your inclusive love and grace,
to help build a society of harmony
in our rainbow diversity.

We pray for those close to our hearts
in the quiet:

(time of quiet)

As we have spoken the names of friends
and family members
and of situations
where healing and comfort are so needed,
let us remember that we too
need prayer and healing.
Make us ready to receive your good news and
then to be witnesses
to your love to all your people. AMEN.

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 - On Jordan's bank TiS 270

OR: Praise with joy the world's creator TiS 179

Blessing

The inexhaustible grace of Christ Jesus,
the all-embracing love of God,
the resilient friendship of the Spirit,
And the rainbow blessing of God
colour your life with blessing today and always.
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
All: in the name of Christ. Amen

Blessing Song - O Lord Jesus Marrkapmirr TiS 253

Reflection: Rev. Arnie Wierenga
Kookaburra Ministry Team
- Leongatha, Korumburra, Loch-Poowong.

Liturgy: Rev. Ian Brown
Wattlebird Ministry Team - Warragul

Editor: Rev. Jennie Gordon
Shearwater Ministry Team - Cowes.
revjenniegordon@gmail.com

