



Second Sunday in Lent, February 25th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Psalm 22:27 - All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

Light the candle

The light shines in the darkness
and the darkness cannot overcome it.

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 – In the presence of your people ***TiS 727***

OR: Where wide sky rolls down. TiS 188

Listening

Read: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16



Prayer

Gracious God,
as you did for Abraham and Sarah,
you reach for us and promise your blessing,
and we are grateful.

We are grateful:

for the song of the earth
for the glory of a sunrise
for the faith of the ancestors
for the hope of the children
for the kindness of those around us.

In the quiet
we bring you the gratitude of our hearts:
(good time of quiet)

Transforming God,
In a world, in our nation, in our lives,
there are so many reasons to feel despair,
and to lose hope
and we confess that we have been the cause,
or contributed to some of that distress.

Forgive us,
ALL: Forgive us

Or in our apathy or ignorance
we have been bystanders,
witnessing destruction of people and place,
passively dwelling in the darkness.

Forgive us,
ALL: Forgive us

And in our pain, we have sometimes lost hope,
failing to trust in your everlasting covenant,
setting our minds on our own hurt and revenge,
unable to rest in your steadfast kindness.

Forgive us,
ALL: Forgive us

But through the scriptures
and through your persistent presence
urging us into life, we reach out.
Hoping against hope,
we hold out our lives towards you,
as you reach for us.

In the words of St Paul - *You bring life to the dead
and call into existence things that do not exist.*

Bring us back to life in you.
(good time of quiet)

Siblings in Christ, be assured,
We are loved.
We are loved.
We are loved.



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Through this love we are forgiven, blessed,
healed, renewed and made whole again.
and all the people say: **Amen.**

Listening

Read: Psalm 22:23-31

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Mark 8:31-38

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

Reflecting - Rev. Amanda Nicholas

The whirlwind of Mark's gospel leaves us but a moment to catch our breath. It's no surprise then that the disciples seem at times out of step with Jesus, getting it wrong. Not seeming to know whether the moment is for speaking up or staying silent. A gospel, it would seem, of sliding doors moments, those seemingly inconsequential everyday moments profoundly impact the trajectory of future events. It's opening verse is the proclamation by John of the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ which is swiftly followed by John baptising Jesus in the Jordan with the visible and audible declaration from God that Jesus is his beloved Son, one to whom we should listen.

This term sliding doors moments became part of 20th century vernacular when the 1998 movie of the same name starring Gwyneth Paltrow was released. The movie depicts dual storylines following Paltrow's character down two varying paths both beginning in the same moment. The paths diverge based on the action she took in that one singular moment, and it might be right about now that you are asking "what has

this to do with the reading from Mark for us today?"

We pick up this week's reading at the pinnacle moment in the account of Jesus foretelling of his death and resurrection. This passage is one of contradictions, confidence, and convictions. In the verses directly preceding we read Peter declaring Jesus the Messiah, and in the very next breath Peter rebukes Jesus for the things Jesus says about how the Son of Man must suffer and die.

I can imagine Peter's confusion. In one moment getting it so right and in the next moment being told that he has it not only wrong, but that he has a limited perspective. That he can only see through one lens and isn't grasping completely what is being spoken of. I sometimes wonder if this was a sliding doors moment for Peter. Whether he wished for a "do-over" or to glimpse what life looked like if only he had remained quiet. Peter was focused on what he thought Jesus was bringing to them as the Messiah. What he could humanly see and expect from his knowledge and experience without realising the breadth of what the Messiah really was that Jesus is. Jesus is telling Peter that he needs to see the whole picture, both the human and the divine at work in the coming times.

What follows next from Jesus is a word not just to Peter but to everyone, made abundantly clear in the way Jesus calls the crowd together with the disciples before speaking to them. In the address following Jesus states plainly for all who would hear what it is to truly be a disciple. To place God at the centre of their lives as that which all else is anchored to. To be bold in proclaiming their faith and unashamed of their beliefs.

In our global society we daily encounter activists in our time who are so passionate about what it is they believe that we can't help but notice the ways in which they speak boldly and unashamedly their message, calling on others to be moved by their convictions and to join their cause. I acknowledge this is a sometimes frustrating and perplexing encounter as I find



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myself wondering about the state of the church (little c, universal) and the ways in which our institutions of faith seem to be distracted by the pull of the world's empires and powers so much that we have lost the art of bold and unashamed proclamation about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In this season of Lent, we are once again invited into the journey towards the cross with Jesus and to the contemplation about what it is to be a disciple. Peter in his zeal for what he believed in, spoke boldly in some moments and in others was unable to see the whole picture denying that which was truth. Peter doesn't always get it right. He is human after all.

Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah stands as testament to his unwavering faith and conviction. His willingness to risk being wrong in order to affirm Jesus' true identity serves as a challenge to all disciples to boldly proclaim the gospel, even in the face of opposition and uncertainty. His subsequent denial of Jesus underscores the frailty of human resolve and the importance of humility in discipleship.

Like Peter, we may stumble and fall in our journey of faith, but it is through our failures and shortcomings that God's grace is made manifest. Mark 8:31-38 invites us to ponder the profound mysteries of discipleship and following Christ. It challenges us to embrace 'sliding door' moments with courage and discernment, to see beyond the limitations of our understanding, and to remain steadfast in our proclamation, even in the face of uncertainty. May we, like Peter, be willing to risk being wrong for the sake of Christ, trusting in his grace to sustain us on the journey.

Singing – Have faith in God, my heart **TiS 619**

OR: I'm not ashamed (TiS 563)
OR: At the name of Jesus (TiS 231)

Offering

We bring these gifts and our lives to you, God of abundant love. Bless them and bless us, so that together we may bring hope and healing where it

is needed, as we participate in your renewing work in the world. Amen.

Notices

How is your church community engaging with Lent. Do you have study groups? If not, the synod website has a number of options – and it's not too late to get going.

Prayers for World & Community

Have a map of the world laid out on a table with space around the edges, and tea-light candles in holders, with a central candle and tapers to light the tea-lights.

Begin with the opening words from Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?

Invite people to light and place the tea-light candles on the map in places of pain that they are praying for, or around the edges of the map for particular people. This can be done in silence, or with a simple prayer sentence.

*Sing a Taizé chant: O Lord hear my (our) prayer,
TiS 741 or Lord, Jesus Christ, TiS 737.*

*Allow plenty of time for people to participate.
Then conclude the prayer with the following:*

In the gathering and lifting of these prayers
we have hope.
You have been with us through all generations,
and those yet unborn will dwell in your peace.
You are our God, and we are your people.

As we pray together then as Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,



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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 – Make me a channel of your peace TiS 607

OR: Take my life and let it be... TiS 599

OR: The great love of God. TiS 164

Blessing

*Psalm 22:27 - All the ends of the earth shall
remember and turn to the LORD; all the families
of the nations shall worship before you.*

Go as bearers of loving-kindness,
following the one who leads us into life.

and as you go,
may the Creator give you hope and strength,
may the Son show you the way
and may the Spirit be alongside,
as companion and comforter.
Always and ever,

and all the people say: **Amen.**

Blessing Song – May the feet of God TiS 779

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