



Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 10th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Let us proclaim God's great deeds
with songs of joy.

From north and south,
from east and west,
from across lands and seas,
We come with shouts of thanksgiving:

**God is good,
God's unchanging love
is for all time.**

In the wilderness of our lives,
We seek solace and guidance.

As we journey through Lent,
May we find renewal and transformation.

- based on Psalm 107 & Numbers 21

Light the candle

*In Christ, the light of the world,
we find, Hope and comfort for heart and mind.*

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 - Holy holy holy TiS 132

OR: TiS 156 Morning has broken

OR: TiS 375 Come let us with the Lord arise



Prayer

In adoration and confession, we come together:
Let us give thanks to the Lord, for God is good,
God's steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
Those who God has redeemed from trouble.

For God satisfies the longing soul,
And fills the hungry soul with good.

We confess, we rebel against God's words,
And reject the counsel of the Almighty.

Yet in our distress, we cry out to the Lord,
And God saves us from our distress.

Leader: We acknowledge our failings,
And our wrongdoing, we confess.

But God sent forth God's word healing us,
And delivering us from destruction.

Therefore let us offer our thanks and praise in
acknowledgement of God's mercy and grace
For God's wondrous works to humankind.
Amen.

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Numbers 21:4-9 &
John 3:14-21

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



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Reflecting - Rev. Arnie Wierenga

As we move further into the season of Lent, we are challenged deeply by our human frailty to continue the journey. In the wilderness, the people of Israel have lost their way. They are fed up with relying on the provision of God, and they are ready to take it out on Moses. After all, who wants manna from heaven every day?

I remember hearing this strange story of wilderness rebellion as a child and feeling frightened and confused. God sends snakes to give them a lesson? Many of them are bitten and die before they come to their senses? Make a bronze serpent and those who cast their eyes upon it will live?

Hang on, wasn't there a story not long ago about this same mob worshipping a golden calf because they thought God and Moses had abandoned them? Wasn't that the worst betrayal – to worship a graven image instead of the one true God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery, out of the house of bondage?

Whatever we make of it, there is a problem of memory; of how the story of God is told and known; an erosion of trust that God was with them and would continue to reach out to them and offer love and life.

All this wilderness talk seems timely for our times. It is as though the whole of earth's people find themselves lost in the wilderness, short of trust, grumbling even about the things that come as gift. Social cohesion is at an all-time low in Australia according to researchers. We've seen this in public spaces where people polarise over issues and nuance is lost. Public debates over same-sex marriage caused great hurt and trauma for many a few years ago. Similar things happened over the *Indigenous voice to Parliament* referendum. YES or NO, but little capacity to speak or think of more than that which divides us.

I had imagined our world would breathe a sigh of relief as we emerged from the pandemic, but it

looks as though we continue to wander in a new wilderness. People seem angry – angry at those who chose a different vaccination path to them; angry at those who enforced lockdown rules; angry at the church that separated vaxxers from no-vaxxers; angry at institutions; angry towards people we once met face to face and were once capable of overcoming differences; angry ...

Rev. Howard Wallace in his commentary on the Numbers story directs attention to the Wisdom of Solomon that sheds light on the strange happenings. As Moses directs people to look up to the bronze serpent, their doing so is an act of faith. It begins to heal the mistrust and division and look to God as life, love and healing. People look beyond the serpent image to find the grace and mercy of God. This is their salvation.

This brings us back to the gospel where looking up at the bronze serpent is compared to gazing on the cross of Christ. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

Both passages seem to point to the good news that comes in believing. Look and see. See and believe. Here is good news. To look at the cross of Jesus, to see and believe is an act of life. Not ordinary life like healing from snakebite. This is eternal life in God's name.

This good news may just be what we need to heal the mistrust of the world, to address our anxieties and fears when we feel lost and alone.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Singing - Now the green blade rises TiS 382

OR: TiS 174 Morning glory, starlit sky (opt. tune VIENNA)

OR: TiS 164 The great love of God is revealed in the Son



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Offering

God who journeys with wanderers and those who tread a path, bless and join these offerings to your abundant love; lift all who journey, towards your light and eternal life. Amen.

Prayers for World & Community

God who is the Divine Nurturer,
hear us as we pray.

We come before you in humility,
aware of our own weaknesses and shortcomings.
In this moment we lift up our siblings in Christ,
all who are struggling
in need of your grace.

May those lost or disconnected,
be awakened to the richness of your mercy.
Guide them,
God of Compassion,
towards the path of righteousness and
understanding.

For those trapped in despair and hopelessness,
may your light shine brightly upon them,
illuminating a way
towards renewal and restoration.
May they experience liberation
from all that confines them,
through freedom in you, Jesus Christ.

We pray for hearts shrouded.
May your light gently soak in them,
until the shadows recede
and they are bathed fully in your love.
Help us all
to embrace forgiveness and reconciliation,
just as you have forgiven us.

May your spirit embrace
those who are weary and burdened,
infuse them with your being.
May they know themselves
as beloved and cherished of you,
regardless of their circumstances.

We give thanks for the gift of salvation,
freely given to all.
May we be living testimonies of your grace,
spreading love and kindness wherever we go.

In your holy name, we pray. 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 - Make me a channel of your peace ***TiS 607***

OR: Guide me O thou great Redeemer TiS 569

Blessing

From north and south,
from east and west,
from across lands and seas,
Let us proclaim God's great deeds
and the salvation that is ours to claim.

Go to bless and be blessed in the name
of God who is the Divine Nurturer
of Christ who redeems us
and of the Holy Spirit
our companion on the journey, who comforts
and sustains. Amen.



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