



Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 5th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Sing to the Lord a new song,
for all the wonderful things
God inspires.

Let's make joyful noise - all the earth
as we marvel and sing praise to God.

(based on Psalm 98)

Light the candle - Christ is with us.

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 - Come O God of all the earth ***TiS 181***

OR: Love divine, all loves excelling TiS 217

OR: Come as you are TiS 693

OR: Joyful joyful we adore you TiS 152

Prayer



God of all the earth,
with the best of our music
we offer you our praise.
Loud instruments, delicate strings,
melody of human invention
alongside the wonder of creation.

We hear the seas roar
as waves crash on beaches;
we hear the wind call out
in praise to you;
the thunder announces your presence
and even flooding waters

Speak of that which is life
to the whole created order.

At our best and at earth's best
we announce your presence, God of all.
At our best and at earth's best
we are joyous and noisy
in our delight and wonder
at the life you give.

But too often we are less than that:
neglect or greed have turned
what is best into a place of crisis.

Where we have relegated kin
to less than us;
where we have seen the earth
as a thing to exploit;
where we have lost a sense
of our place in all you have given
and think we are masters
of our destiny -
we pray you forgive us.

Help us to see earth
through your eyes,
in your wonder,
in your creative balance of
flora and fauna that is
so wonderfully made.

Help us turn from our lust
to squeeze more from this planet
than it can reasonably bear.
Restore to us the kind of awe
that has us making a joyful noise,
all the earth.

May the roaring seas remind us;
the flash of lightning and clap of thunder;
may flora and fauna alike
draw us to wonder about
the life you have given us,
and reasons to be joyful.

May our instruments sing again
in melody and harmony with
your creation. For God's sake,

*The Fig Tree Worship Resource comes to you from the Friends of the Fig Tree, Uniting Church in Australia
with blessings and permission to use the content in worship services with acknowledgement.*



Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 5th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

in the love of Christ, and
with the breath of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Acts 10:44-48 &
John 15:9-17

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

Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton

*"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you;
abide in my love." John 15:9*

*"This is my commandment, that you love one
another as I have loved you. No one has greater
love than this, to lay down one's life for one's
friends." John 15:12-13*

The current conflict in the Middle East between Israel and Hamas (Gaza) is only one of the many long and bitter conflicts that have played out on that region. I have stood on top of the Golan Heights in Israel and seen trenches left from previous wars. And I have been at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter first confessed that Jesus was the Christ, whilst United Nations peacekeepers patrolled around battlements in this volatile place.

But, the experience that most drove home to me the terror, the horror and the human cost of these conflicts was hearing Terry Waite speak about his experiences as a captive of Hezbollah in Beirut during the Lebanese civil war in the 1980's.

You might remember that during the 1980's, a range of terrorist groups and regimes, including Hezbollah, undertook heinous acts which included hijacking and blowing up planes, suicide

bombings, and kidnapping and sometimes killing hostages.

Terry Waite, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy, undertook risky negotiations with some of these groups to try to secure the release of hostages. He was successful in missions to Iran, Libya, and Lebanon between 1980 and 1985. Then in 1987, when he travelled to Lebanon to try to secure the release of four hostages, he was himself kidnapped and held for 1,763 days.

Terry was held in solitary confinement for most of that time. He was shackled in chains, often kept in the dark, and frequently tortured. It was brutal, inhumane treatment. It was designed to humiliate and distress, and it threatened Terry's health and sanity. Throughout this difficult time, Terry gained comfort from his faith, and from reciting the prayers from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer that he had learned by heart.

He missed his family and friends dreadfully, but only received one piece of mail during his whole time in captivity (although thousands of people wrote to him). It was a postcard from a stranger. It depicted John Bunyan in his prison cell in Bedford Jail, and the message on the back read, "Dear Terry, You are not forgotten. People everywhere are praying for your release, and that of the other hostages. With best wishes, Joy Brodier."

This card gave Terry great comfort at a very low point. In a speech he made after his release, he referred to Joy sending him that postcard and said, "I would say to you all, never despise those simple actions. Something, somewhere, will get through to the people you are concerned about, as it got through to me and my fellow hostages eventually."

Now, it is clear to me that Terry Waite's actions of risking his life to try to negotiate the release of hostages in Lebanon, was an act of costly and sacrificial love. He was, and still is, a true servant of Jesus Christ, and he followed the example of



Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 5th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Christ in being willing to lay down his life for the sake of those who were in captivity and being threatened with execution. And he paid a high price for that act of love.

I'm not sure that I could ever be as brave and unselfish as Terry was in willingly venturing into such a dangerous situation. But, I guess, we don't know our capacity for bravery and self-giving love unless we are put to the test.

It was impressive, however, to see how quite a few people acted with great courage to try to protect others when Joel Cauchi started stabbing people in a Bondi shopping centre on 13th April. In response to this and other horrible events, a letter writer in The Age this week noted that "for every person who does a horrible attack we see heroes coming to help." He also wrote, "We should not live in fear but join together to celebrate those who keep us safe, both incidental heroes and our emergency services..."

I'm sure that he is right. We should acknowledge that those who acted with courage in the face of danger showed truly self-giving love of the sort that Jesus calls his followers to emulate. But then, it is also true, that we have been created by God to be people who love and serve one another. This lies at the heart of the Gospel, and it is our reason for living. So, we should do our best to find ways, large and small, to show love to one another.

There are many ways in which we can show that we love one another. Some of them are as simple as the postcard Joy Brodier sent Terry Waite in prison. But just maybe, the most difficult, but also the most important way we can show love is to be people who do all we can to try to end the cycles of hatred, disunity, power abuse, violence, and war. To be people who work to bring about reconciliation, mutual respect and peace in our own communities and across the world in whatever way we can.

Terry Waite went back to Beirut in 2012 and met with some of his captors, seeking to put the past

behind and forge a new way forward, and found he was able to work constructively with them to help others. If he, who had suffered so much, could do this, surely we can find ways to build love and peace in our communities and beyond.

Singing - Brother, sister TiS 650

OR: Make me a channel of your peace TiS 607

OR: When I needed a neighbour TiS 629

Offering

We hear from John's gospel that Jesus has chosen us - and calls us to bear fruit in God's name.

(from John 15:16)

God of our Lord Jesus Christ, bless what we have offered in your name, that it may bear fruit that will last. Bless us in all we do, that our lives too bear lasting fruit to your glory. Amen.

Notices

May 11 is world *Fair Trade Day*.

Prayers for World & Community

God of all, we hear that Jesus chooses and calls us to live out your love, and to bear fruit in your name.

As we pray for the world and our community, may love move us to action, compassion, and fruitful restoration in your name.

We pray for a world that is deeply distressed and troubled. May love overcome hatred, may love touch hearts intent on war or revenge, may we be moved by your love for all the earth.

We bring to mind the recent knife attacks in Sydney, and pray for all who experience terror or violence. President of the Uniting Church, Rev. Sharon Hollis says:

"The witness of Easter is that our darkest valleys are lit by the mercy of God who comes not as one removed from the suffering of the world but as One who has walked this darkest



Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 5th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

valley before us and has transformed the darkness."

May the love of our risen Christ move us to make a difference in our communities. May love and understanding be the measure of how we approach racism, mental health issues, people of different faiths, and love for our neighbour.

We pray for our church that Christ's word of love may help us in our own communion, and in our relationships across communions. Help us remember that Christ has chosen us to be instruments of God's love, and bear fruit in his name.

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 - Holy Spirit go before us TiS 420

OR: Filled with the Spirit's power TiS 411

Blessing

As Jesus names us as friends
in close relationship to the Father,
as people moved by the Holy Spirit,
we are called to go in love
for the sake of the world.
As Christ has loved us,
so let us love one another,
and bear lasting fruit in God's name.

The blessing of God:

Creator

Friend

Inspiration

be yours now and always. Amen.

Reflection: Rev. Sandra Houghton,
retired minister, Sale, Vic.

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

Editor: Rev. Arnie Wierenga

