



## ***Sunday October 6th, 2024***

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

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

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*(From Psalm 26: 5-7 The Message)*

I scrub my hands with the purest soap,  
then join with the others in the great circle.  
Dancing around your altar, O God.  
Singing God songs at the top of my lungs.  
Telling God stories.

*Light the candle - Christ is with us.*

#### ***Acknowledging***

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**Uniting Aboriginal and Islander  
Christian Congress**

As we gather, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these unceded land and waters. (Please name those people where you are). 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 - Sing praise and thanksgiving***

***TiS 107***

OR: Praise the Spirit in Creation TiS 415

#### ***Prayer***

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As we come together in this place,  
We are thankful for all we have;  
homes, food, friends,  
and a wonderful safe place to meet.

We thank you for all creation.  
The joy of all we can see, hear and feel,  
the pleasure of meeting with friends,  
sharing news,  
encouraging each other,  
being together,  
and the opportunity of worshipping together.

We would like to be people of integrity like Job,  
but know we often fall short  
and ask for your forgiveness.

For times when we have been envious  
and not grateful for all we have.

For holding tightly to what we have  
and not living with a spirit of generosity.

For unjustified anger  
instead of kindness and listening.

For acting quickly  
instead of thoughtfully.

For being peace breakers  
instead of peacemakers.

For all the times we have fallen short  
of being who we would want to be.

Forgive us,  
Amen.

Siblings in Christ,  
we are loved and forgiven in the name of Christ.  
**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:** Job 1:1; 2:10-10

Psalm 26

Mark 10:2-16

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

*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.*



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#### ***Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton***

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I once had a friend who was born with the genetic condition called Neurofibromatosis or von Recklinghausen syndrome. But you may have heard it called the Elephant Man disease. People with Neurofibromatosis develop tumours on nerve endings anywhere in the body. These tumours are mostly non-cancerous, but they press on the nerve endings and often cause excruciating pain and disfigurement (hence the name Elephant Man disease). If the tumours are removed, they generally grow back and often become cancerous. My friend Mary's mother had died of a cancer caused by this disease, and Mary suffered unrelenting pain and muscle weakness that stopped her from working.

Now Mary was a devout Christian and she attended a very popular Pentecostal Church in Melbourne. This church had a strong healing ministry, and naturally my friend Mary sought healing. But despite many prayers and laying on of hands, she was not healed. The leaders of the church began to question my friend's faith, saying that if she had a strong enough faith and had truly repented of all her sins, she would be healed. By saying this they were putting the blame on her for her disease and suffering when this was a disease she was born with.

We, her friends, were horrified by this. But Mary kept going back to that church and its so-called healing ministry. Only when one of her friends, who also attended the same church, committed suicide did Mary finally leave that church. That friend also had suffered from a life-threatening illness, and he had likewise been told that it was his sinfulness that stopped him from being healed. Mary was heartbroken, and finally accepted that something was very wrong with that church's teaching.

That was more than forty years ago, but each time the lectionary reaches the Book of Job, I think about Mary and her undeserved suffering, and their victim blaming, and I still feel angry. I believe that the leaders of that church needed to

read Job and see how it addresses at length the issue of suffering, and particularly unjust and undeserved suffering. Because if they had, they would discover that they were like Job's misguided friends (whom we'll hear from at length in this book) who blamed his suffering on him.

However, we are told from the beginning of the book that Job did nothing to deserve his suffering. The book sets out to debunk the prevalent belief in Judaism that suffering was always the result of sinfulness by telling the tale of a righteous man who suffered much undeservedly, and who was ultimately vindicated and blessed because of his righteousness.

Unfortunately, this belief was still prevalent in Jesus' day. The ill and disabled, the deaf and blind, the lepers, and the mentally ill were still shunned and excluded from the synagogues and temple, but often also from their families and communities. They frequently had to resort to begging to survive. It was still widely believed that suffering was a result of sinfulness (either that person's sinfulness or sometimes their parent's or ancestor's sinfulness).

Remember when Jesus was confronted by a blind man in Jerusalem, Jesus' disciples, reflecting the thinking of their day, asked Jesus if the man was blind because of his own sin or his parent's sin. Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." (John 9:2-3). Jesus then healed the blind man, just like he healed so many other people. Jesus never victim-blamed, rather he reached out in love and compassion. He ignored the religious rules about uncleanness and exclusion, and touched the sick and even the dead. Jesus touched them to heal, to comfort, and to enable them to reclaim their place in community.

The Book of Job also brings into question the widely held belief that righteousness or faithfulness is some sort of protection against bad things happening to you or your loved ones. But as Dianne Komp, a doctor who has worked



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extensively with children with cancer, and who has written a commentary on Job, suggests that “Not until we experience personal suffering can we finally grasp that evil things can and do happen to people who live decent lives. They even happen to people who love and serve God.”

The book offers no easy answers. God did not offer to Job the reasons for his suffering. As readers, we are told that Satan was to blame. But what Job did get to know in time, was that he was never alone in his suffering. God was somehow there in the suffering. God had not abandoned him.

As Christians, we understand that God enters into our suffering to be with us, and to give us the strength and resources we need to go through the suffering. God offers healing, but often not in the way we might wish for. But we are invited to come to God with an openness to explore the mystery of God and to be willing to trust God like a child trusts a loving parent, knowing that somehow we will be blessed. Amen.

#### ***Singing - Beauty for brokenness, TIS 674***

OR: All go to God when they are... TIS 240  
Inspired by love and anger TIS 690

#### ***Offering***

As people of God,  
we bring ourselves,  
all that we have and who we are.  
We ask your blessing on these offerings  
to be used in your world.  
Amen

#### ***Notices***

October 7th is World Habitat Day.  
October 10th is World Mental Health Day.

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

Loving God We thank you that we live in this country with its variety of living things, and that

we live in peace with an abundance of all we need. We pray for those who do not have these advantages, those in war torn countries, in overcrowded cities, and on land which does not produce all they need.

We thank you for the church in Australia. Help us to work for friendship and unity of all denominations. We pray for all who lead and enable Christians to gather for worship.

We pray for the Federal and State Governments of this country and for all in positions of authority. We pray that they may govern wisely and justly so that all may live in peace and safety.

We pray for people for all those who keep us safe, on the roads, in our homes, in all places where we gather.

We pray for all those who work as caregivers, for the old and the young, for those in institutions and the lost, hungry and homeless.

We pray for those who grieve for loss in death, in illness, relationship breakdowns, employment or just that life is not working out the way they hoped and dreamed.

We pray for the members of our community, present or absent, our families, friends and all those we love.

We pray for ourselves and for each other. Give us a vision of what we are capable of becoming. We ask that you transform us, so that despite being ordinary people we become capable of doing extraordinary things. Help us to listen as individuals and community so we become the people you have called us to be.

In silence we offer the prayers, so deep that we do not have the words.

*Hold a time of silence...*

We pray together then as Jesus taught us:



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#### ***The Lord's Prayer***

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

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OR: Kneels at the feet of his friends TiS 640

#### ***Blessing***

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Go as little children,  
seeing the world through innocent eyes  
as a beautiful place.

Seeing all people as friends,  
and each day as new, refreshing and exciting.

May God the creator, redeemer and  
sustainer  
be with you every step of the journey.  
Amen

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