



Third Sunday in Advent, December 15th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource



Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.
Let your gentleness be known to everyone.
The Lord is near.
Do not be anxious about anything,
but in everything by prayer and supplication
with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds
in Christ Jesus.

Light the candles of hope, peace and joy

Singing: Come, let's walk. based on Isaiah 2:5
words: Jennie Gordon © 2019
tune: Twinkle, twinkle, little star

Come, let's walk the path of light
through the darkness of the night.
Now the lost don't walk alone,
hungry ones are welcomed home.
Joy in what we do and say,
Joy between us on the way.

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 and present. 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 - Praise with joy TiS 179

OR: Sing all creation TiS 61

Prayer

God who made us
with muscles to laugh and to cry,
sometimes simultaneously,
we bring our praise to you
for the awesome gift of this life.

Mountains tower above us,
trees reach for the sky
and grasses sway in tune with the breezes.
Seas roar and tides roll in and out.
Rivers cascade into white waterfalls,
then eddy around, running deep and fast,
or finding rest in billabongs.

All kinds of creatures play in the light and dark,
seen and unseen,
and we take our place in the order of things,
singing joyous praise
with the voice and the life you have given us.

We pause in praise ...
(time of quiet)

And yet, we confess;

we are often too busy
to sing songs of praise.

we are usually too preoccupied
to witness your wonder

we are frequently forgetful
of your nearness.

Forgive us and come close to us.
Take from us the anxious delusions
that we are not enough,
that we don't have enough
that there is not enough love
to go around.

Make us gentle, make us grateful.
Give us grace to spare, peace to share. Amen.

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Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Zephaniah 3: 14-20
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:7-18,

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

Reflecting - Rev. Deacon Wendy Elson

Rejoice, rejoice!

Hang on, why are we rejoicing, there seems a lot to be unhappy about. "Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near." There seems to be so much rage around today in this climate of outrage. Everything seems to shout its displeasure. Yet our joy is in gentleness because God is near. Uncanny that!

Do not be anxious! This an interesting idea when we are approaching Christmas, and there is so much to do! Clearly the writer of this didn't have the Christmas season in mind, there is so much to worry about. Not least, world peace!

The peace of God which passes understanding. I feel more peaceful just saying that. What a gift it is to offer peace to others. ".....The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace".

Luke's reading shows us an angry John telling the people that token baptism (like pew-sitting) isn't enough. They must live their salvation every day. How painful it is to look in the wardrobe and see so many clothes in the face of John's comments on having one coat and giving the rest away! Dorothy Day is quoted as saying that if we have two coats, we have stolen one from the poor!! This is such a challenge to me, to live simply and share. It seems that

salvation does not sit in any one personal act of repentance and 'conversion', but rather in who we are in regards to our treatment of one another. We are the agents of salvation and transformation for others.

To be honest, it is very tempting to me to ignore the Zephaniah reading. It is loaded with triumphalism and victory over enemies, and it plays into my fears and sadness in the events in the Middle East right now. However, this luxury does not feel open to me, as pretending texts don't exist when they are uncomfortable feels like a cop out.

This little book, hidden away at the end of the Old Testament, is one of the lesser-known prophets (the ones we may well have trouble locating and need to use the index). Nahum and Habakkuk and Zephaniah were likely contemporaries, speaking during the Babylonian crisis, and Zephaniah is forewarning of coming judgement. He ends, however, with a song of joy. Gloom and doom and then rejoicing. If you have a Christmas Wreath with a pink candle for Advent 3 it represents joy and this Sunday is sometimes known as "Gaudete (meaning 'Rejoice') Sunday".

In this passage God is joyous, totally elated and engulfed by joy. This book that begins with the threat of eradication ends with a joyous God. Evil will be no more. Even in our failures and our struggles, God has hold of us. The people are redeemed and forgiven and, in words echoed throughout the gospels, told not to fear because the compassionate God is present with them. The people are renewed in God's love.

An important point, perhaps a redeeming point is this: the final verses make clear that God is on the side of the oppressed and not the oppressor. God sides with the lame and the outcast and deals with those who are the oppressors. There is no fence-sitting for any of us on this point, the dangers of this are clear. If we do not stand with the oppressed, we stand with the oppressor. And then in the final verse, God will gather us and bring us home. I wonder how I would hear these promises if I was homeless, or



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outcast. If I was a refugee or dispossessed and longing for home. Or my home was taken, or stolen along with the generations of my people.

And so, we rejoice in the Lord always, for God is present with us and stands with the vulnerable and the marginalized. Shout aloud and sing for joy. God loves liberation. Free now of judgement we can enjoy true freedom and homecoming. Free to indulge in this space of mercy and grace and peace, the peace which passes all understanding. We can be gentle because God is near. I can get lost in the idea of God's joyous chortling in bringing us home!

Singing - Rejoice in the Lord always.

OR: The bright wind is blowing - TIS 263

Someone in your gathering will know how to sing this round!

Rejoice in the Lord always
and again I say rejoice,
Rejoice in the Lord always
and again I say rejoice!

Rejoice, rejoice, and again I say rejoice,
Rejoice, rejoice, and again I say rejoice!

(repeat as many times as possible!)

Offering

Bless these gifts we bring,
an offering of our hearts,
and a sharing of your grace.
Bless them and use them,
so that if someone needs a coat,
we can clothe them,
and if someone needs a shoulder,
we can be there in your name.
And all the people say: **Amen.**

Notices

As well as the Sundays in December, the *Friends of the Fig Tree* will be offering you *The Fig Tree Worship Resource* for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. If you're an email subscriber, look for them in your inbox. If not, you can subscribe here: <https://figtreeworshipresource.blog/subscribe/>

If you access this through the UCA Synod of Vic/Tas website, then let them know you appreciate their collaboration.

Prayers for World & Community

As we await the celebration of your coming,
Jesus the Christ,
we pray for the blessing of your presence
in this world that you love so much.

Bless the earth and all things living,
with breath, healing and hope.

Bless those who have much
with a heart to share.

Bless those who have little
with the means to receive.

Bless the ones who wage war
with a longing for peace.

Bless the ones who need shelter
with a safe place to sleep.

Bless the anxious and the distressed,
the hurt, the haunted and the hungry
with care, comfort and community.

Bless those we hold close
and bless us too ...
(hold a space of quiet where candles can be lit)

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.



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Singing - Joyful, joyful we adore you

TiS 152

OR: Let us sing to the God of salvation TiS 52

OR: Joy to the word TiS 268

(if you don't mind singing this before Christmas Day.)

Blessing

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always;

again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near.

Do not be anxious about anything,

but in everything by prayer and supplication

with thanksgiving

let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God,

which surpasses all understanding,

will guard your hearts and your minds

in Christ Jesus.

Go to love and serve, in peace, and joy,

in the name of Christ, Amen

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