



Easter 5 - Sunday May 18th, 2025

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

**Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!**

Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!

**Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!**

Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,

**fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!**

Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

**Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!**

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

**Young men and women alike,
old and young together!**

Let us praise the name of the LORD

We light the candle in praise and thanksgiving for this day.

Acknowledging



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress*

The Ancient of Days breathed life into this land and her peoples. From time beyond our reckoning the *(please name the people on whose land you gather)* People, the Traditional Custodians, have blessed this place through their law and customs, their care and life. We pay respects to their Elders and leaders past and present, and pray for the future of their communities. May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.

Singing - Joyful joyful we adore you TiS 152

OR: Come O God of all the earth TiS 181

OR: Love divine all loves excelling TiS 217

Prayer



Come to us O God, like a fresh breeze that blows through a polluted city, a rain that falls on a parched land, a new vision that usurps our tired ways.

You have shown us what it is to be truly human, and the scriptures remind us again and again of the might and grandeur of that which you have created.

Forgive us then, when we fall back into ways that limit and exclude. Forgive us the pride which creates ourselves at the centre of the universe.

Forgive us our small mindedness around what your future for us could be. Forgive us that we do not take ourselves seriously as an Easter people, the ones that hold the hope and promise of your word and the abundant life that is available to all.

Call us yet again to be your children, bearers of your image and agents of your love.

Strengthen our commitment to follow your Spirit into all of the world, speaking the healing word, carrying loving acts, and listening for you where you have gone before us. We seek your wisdom in our journey together as followers of the man Jesus, whom we call the Christ. Amen.

Know it, say it and believe it: in all things, through Christ we are forgiven. **Thanks be to God**

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Acts 11:1-18 &
John 13:31-35

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



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Reflecting - Rev. Arnie Wierenga

The Beatles said "All you need is love" and then they broke up!

- Larry Norman (*from the album 'Only visiting this planet'*)

I remember this song lyric as a youngster because my older brother was a Larry Norman fan. I didn't know much about the Beatles at the time, or the challenges to make love an enduring thing that keeps people together. But I did hear this as criticism of the fab four, as though they somehow had missed the point, and that Christians know better ...

I'm sure that for at least some parts of my life I've been arrogant enough to believe that Christians know better than the rest of the world. As I've aged and hopefully grown less naïve and perhaps even grown in wisdom, I'm hesitant to suggest those who follow Christ have much of an advantage when it comes to expressing God's love.

And I'm sure that may be a little unsettling to hear.

In the same era as Larry Norman, the church was singing a lovely chorus that reflects the gospel reading from John. "They will know we are Christians by our love." Don't get me wrong, I want all who follow Christ to be so overcome and influenced by God's love and grace that our cup overflows, until others wonder what kind of juice we are taking. But do "they" see who "we" are and wonder and want what it is we have? That is perhaps the sharp end of the challenge about knowing and living into God's glory.

In my early years it seemed so easy. Love and acceptance. Not holding onto anger, fear, grudges, painful memories. Just let it all go. Love is all you need, at least God's love makes everything new. It is simple, isn't it?

I don't disagree with the sentiment the Beatles put to song. To this day I love that song as I do

most of their work. I don't know enough of their struggles to know why they split up, but it's not my story to know or tell. Even as Larry Norman notes this about them, he has stumbled upon something universal (I hope he realised it was true even for him). Even those who follow Christ struggle to love as God has first loved us.

I do wish it were easier to love than it actually is. And I wish there were some kind of easy path that happens through Jesus' death and resurrection. I wish that the early church could have paved the way for us with their knowledge and insights. I wish ...

But the truth is the early church was as fractious and divided as we are. Much of the squabble was about who was in and who was out; about what rules were important and what could be let go of. The whole Jewish thing of cleanliness and becoming unclean was a serious business. It wasn't that Jews shunned non-Jewish people (otherwise known as Gentiles). It was that as a Jew you shouldn't allow yourself to become unclean without reason. To attend to the dead was a good reason. To menstruate was clearly unavoidable and a life-giving good reason. There were simple ways to become ritually clean again so you could participate in religious and communal life. It was as common as personal sanitation. But don't become unclean for no good reason ...

And that meant do not casually enter the house of a Gentile! No simple gathering of hospitality around the table. An automatic division between who is in and who is out. And this didn't gel well with those who experienced the risen Christ. How are we to make sense of what Christ has shown us of God's love? How dare we keep this to the Jewish world when Jesus was opening up all nations to the love and grace of God?

For some the shift of thinking was too hard. Biblical law is biblical law, and it is sacrosanct. For others they needed divine intervention to be persuaded it could be otherwise. So, Peter's vision as outlined in the book of Acts is a big and important chapter of the early church and their



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struggle to do justice to what Christ has done. And for others it was much simpler than that. The love of God is supreme and does away with any law or tradition that seems to get in the way of that love.

So, I'm back with the Beatles. "Love is all you need." And the simplicity of message of the gospel remains a challenge to any who claim Christ. Everyone will know we follow him if we love one another.

It seems it is as easy and as difficult as that.

Perhaps this weekly ritual of communal gathering and other disciplines like daily scripture reading, prayer, meditation and the like are more important than we ever imagined. We are all works in progress, knowing the simplicity of the message of love and hope and yet always needing to be wrapped up in grace and renewal.

May love go deep because we open and allow the love of God to renew and transform us. In the name of Christ, may it be so.

Singing - A new commandment TiS 699

OR: Help us accept each other TiS 648

OR: Lord let me see more and more TiS 681

OR: Made in God's Likeness TiS 671

Offering

Gracious God, we bring these gifts, knowing that they are a small reflection of your generous abundance to us. We hope and pray that through your power, our lives and these gifts will be magnified to truly represent your graciousness and spaciousness in the whole of creation. Amen.

Notices

Laudato Si' week runs until May 24. This was established by the late Pope Francis to remind us of our God given duty of care for our common home, earth.

May 22nd is the *International Day of Biological Diversity*.

Prayers for World & Community

You have touched our lives O God, with the call to be a special people. As people who understand the power of prayer and the wisdom of following your lead in the world. At this time, we pray that our commitment for compassion, peace and healing for others and the world, are not just words, but become manifest in the way we respond as a community to those around us.

We pray for those who are lost, alone and broken. When we see this Lord, may our prayers become companionship.

We pray for those who are ill, healing or in grief. When we see this Lord, may our prayers become a balm of healing.

We pray for those who are responsible and tired, and burdened by complexity. When we see this Lord, may our prayers become a helping hand. We pray for those who long to know you, but cannot find the way or the words to ask. When we see this Lord, may our prayers become an invitation.

Gracious God, we bring to you now the prayers of our hearts, sometimes unarticulated, but deep and full of longing.

(Silence)

Lord in your mercy hear our prayers.

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 - Filled with the Spirit's power

TiS 411

OR: When I needed a neighbor were you there TiS 629

OR: Guide me O thou great Redeemer TiS 569

Blessing

This is the moment for which we have been called together, the moment when, enriched by our gathering, strengthened by your love, with imaginations kindled by a shared vision of your future, we go out to live in your love, peace and power so that world may see us and catch the vision too.

In the name of
the Creator,
the Redemer and
the Sustainer. Amen.

Blessing Song

- You shall go out with joy TiS 755

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