



Sunday February 1st, 2026

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Welcome

Welcome to worship on this fourth Sunday of Epiphany. The time when we grasp the reality of the incarnation of the Living God, when we are told how our understandings of the way things should be, are turned upside down. May we continue to be a witness to this call as followers of Christ.

Lighting the Candle & Call to Worship

Lighting of the Candle

We acknowledge that we walk with the Light of the World. In the name of Christ, we light this candle.

Call to worship - Psalm 15: 1-5

O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?

Those who walk blamelessly and do what is right and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue and do no evil to their friends nor heap shame upon their neighbours; in whose eyes the wicked are despised but who honour those who fear the Lord;

who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

As we look upon the hills and the valleys, we see love poured out on this land by those who have cared for this land since time before measure. We honour those who have gone before and are yet to come. May we be mindful of the calling God

places on humanity to care for creation. May we respect the wisdom of the ... (please use the name of the Traditional Custodians of the land) People, whose stories are entwined with the stewarding of this place. May we learn from them and walk with them in God's covenant.

Singing - Here in this place TIS 474

OR: Lord your almighty word TIS 447

OR: Lord of creation to you be all praise TIS 626



Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you that we can gather together in your name, as part of the great cloud of witnesses who have worshipped you over millennia. We bring ourselves to be receivers of your wisdom, knowing that in your mystery our lives will not be the same.

We hold ourselves as foolish Gracious God, relinquishing our wisdom for the joy of knowing you fully in your revelation through Jesus Christ. We thank you for your faithfulness to us, knowing that we can rely on your presence as you have promised. Come Gracious God, stir our deepest intuition and longing, raise in us the hope and presence of your love.

We confess that we find letting go of our wisdom and power hard to do, Lord. We confess that we cannot always live up to the expectations you have for us to live deeply and meaningfully in your presence. We confess that sometimes your call on our lives seems too hard, too foolish, too costly. We confess how we are overwhelmed by the simplicity of your message of justice, peace and humility. Yet Lord, as always you confound our expectations by offering us complete redemption in the name of Christ.

Strengthen us again O God to hear once more your challenge on our lives this day. Allow us the courage to respond in the joy of abundant life which we know is your will for the whole of creation. Amen



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Hear then anew the words of great liberation, in Christ our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God**

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Micah 6:1-8;
Matthew 5:1-12

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

Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton

In his early ministry Jesus was in the area around the Sea of Galilee in Northern Israel. When Jesus wanted to teach the disciples, he often took them way up high, away from any distractions. In this high setting, we could interpret that Jesus is the new Moses. In the past, Moses received the law and the Ten Commandments from God on a mountain, now we are being shown Jesus revealing God's will on a mountain.

The 'baby' disciples had much to learn, but Jesus was a master teacher. He caught their attention by taking what they thought they knew and turning it upside down!

Jesus taught them about what was blessed. 'Blessed' in the Bible has a specific meaning. Blessed means *holy or revered or loved by God*. Sometimes it is translated as happy, but this is an inadequate translation. To be blessed is to be in a good relationship with God or to be holy. The opposite to 'blessed' is 'cursed'.

It was a very religious society. People wanted to live Godly, blessed lives, but they also lived in a very difficult period of history under the tyrannical rule of the Romans. They were a subjugated and humiliated people. The Romans heavily taxed them and sometimes punished them very cruelly

and punitively for perceived breaches of Roman rule.

As well as that, there was the reality that there was little in the way of effective medical care. Infant and maternal mortality was high. Many people died young. Common diseases often proved fatal, and injuries like broken bones led to death or disability. The sick and disabled were often shunned out of fear of contagion or because they were believed to be cursed.

Sickness and disability were often blamed on sinfulness. So, the ill and disabled often suffered the double whammy of having to put up with their suffering and being blamed for this suffering, as if it were self-inflicted. Sometimes, the suffering of children was blamed on the sinfulness of their parents.

Life was tough and work was often back breaking. Many people barely got enough to eat as they had little in the way of arable land to cultivate. Even food preparation was laborious. There were no laboursaving devices except for the simplest of grinding stones. Hunger was the lot of many people, especially in years of drought or when the rains were late.

Consequently, many people were suffering. And because of the prevailing understanding of who was blessed and who was cursed, many of these people believed themselves to be cursed and often they blamed themselves thinking that they must have done something to deserve this suffering.

This is the context of Jesus' teachings that we call the Beatitudes. They might well be suffering now, but that is not an indication of wrong doing or sinfulness. The Beatitudes offer hope and comfort to people in awful situations, hope that they are not forgotten and hope that things will change.

God has always had a special love and concern for those who are suffering. This is the God who used Moses to rescue the people out of slavery in



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Egypt because he heard their cries as they suffered the brutality meted out by their Egyptian slave masters. This is the central and formative story of the Jewish people – the Exodus. All of Jesus' disciples would have known the story of the Exodus as they recited that story every year in the Passover festival. So, they knew from that foundational part of their history that God cared about the sufferings of God's people.

Now Jesus was showing this same love and concern when he pronounced these blessings on the meek, the grief stricken, the impoverished, and the oppressed. But his words were never mere platitudes because he also used his life and ministry to empower the meek, to feed the hungry, to care for the poor, to heal the sick and to demand justice for the oppressed.

Jesus acted. He didn't simply *speak* blessing. He lived it. He embodied it. He incarnated it. Through his words, his hands, his feet, his life, he brought about the very blessings he promised. Insisting that pain in and of itself is neither holy nor redemptive in the Christian story, Jesus worked to bring healing, abundance, liberation, and joy to everyone who crossed his path.

Likewise, we are called to be a blessing to others by embodying the gospel. We, too, are called to be sharers of hope, healing, love, compassion, and peace. We, too, are called to shine light and love into dark places.

We are reminded by the Beatitudes, that even in the worst of situations, God's love is always present. When we are the ones suffering in that darkness, we can be sure that we are not alone, that God is present and that God loves us, and that hope is present. And when we reach out to others who are in those dark places with love and compassion, reassuring them of the love and compassion of God, we are doing the work of Christ.

Singing - Comfort, comfort all my people

TiS 647

OR: What does the Lord require? TiS 618

OR: Father in heaven TiS 465

Offering

Lord, we are thankful that we have been called as your people and that we have been given a community to which we all belong. Let these gifts of belonging be used for the things you call us to be and do in the world. Amen

Notices

Today begins the World Interfaith Harmony Week which was conceived to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence, and was first proposed by King Abdullah II of Jordan at the United Nations in 2010. This was quickly adopted by the UN General Assembly ... calling on governments, institutions and civil society to observe it with various programs and initiatives that would promote the aim of the WIHW objectives.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/interfaith-harmony-week>

Prayers for World & Community

Thank you for your divine discontent, Lord. We pray for all those who are poor in Spirit. For those who are longing for hope and life in this world. We know they are yours loving God and we can be their companions.

We pray for those who mourn. Who are sick and lost in grief. We know that you are with them loving God and that we can be their companions.

We pray for the powerless. For those who are lost in the machinery of social and political deserts and have no voice to be heard. We know that you are with them loving God, and that we can be their companions.



We pray for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Who may frighten us with fervent advocacy and raised voices of discontent. We know that you are with them loving God and that we can be their companions.

We pray for those who are merciful. Who give themselves for the greater good and hope of our communities. Who dedicate their lives to the care of others. We know that you are with them loving God and that we can be their companions.

We pray for those who are pure in heart. Whatever their gender, race, creed or religion. We know that you are with them loving God and that we can be their companions.

We pray for the peacemakers. Those who against all odds turn their faces to the hope of a world not governed by repression and violence. We know that you are with them loving God and that we can be their companions.

We pray for those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Those whose claims for a just and loving community infused with a love of God are marginalised and rejected. We know that you are with them loving God and that we can be their companions.

Thank you for your divine discontent Lord,
and your call to us
to be part of the renewal of your creation.

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 - Praise with joy the world's creator TIS 179

OR: Not the powerful Tis 288
OR: Lord, your word abiding Tis 427

Blessing

Go now with a vital and living faith.
One that sees the ways
that lives can be changed and shaped
according to God's will
of redemption and liberation.

Permit yourselves to be shaped by the call
to justice, love and humility.

Rejoice in the hope for the whole of creation.
In the name of the one who created us,
redeemed us and sustains us. Amen.

Reflection: Rev Sandra Houghton
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Liturgy: Rev. Heather den Houting
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