



Gathering & Lighting the Candle

Today, perhaps more than any other, we need the light to shine among us.

On a day that confronts us with the worst of humanity, the light calls us to see things anew.

We light a candle, and as its fragile flickering flame pushes back the darkness, we hear the story of Jesus - confronting the darkness, in order to defeat it.

Let us worship God.

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and these 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: Here hangs a man discarded. (TiS 356)

Prayer



God of our Lord Jesus Christ, we wonder at a world capable of such destruction to any and all who seem a threat.

As we enter the difficult story of Jesus' betrayal, trial and crucifixion, we pause to take in a long and troubled history of betrayals, trials and unjust deaths.

As we desire for good to overcome evil, for light to overcome darkness,

for a new earth to replace the one we inhabit, we pray that we might find ourselves in your light and life.

But we know we are capable of adding to the suffering of others, that there are people we struggle to live alongside.

When we speak ill of others to make ourselves look or feel better,

Lord forgive us. Lord forgive us.

When we deny the destruction and chaos we cause others,

Christ forgive us. Christ forgive us.

When we lack courage to walk the way of the cross and find comfort in darkness and shadows.

Lord forgive us. Lord forgive us.

Jesus chose ordinary people like Peter to accompany him on his journey, including to the cross. Even when we struggle to journey with Jesus, like Peter we are offered new life through Christ. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Listening

Read: Isaiah 52: 13 - 53: 12 &
John 18: 28 - 19: 42

If appropriate, extinguish the candle at John 19:30.

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

Reflecting - Rev. Ian Brown

Tough reading! Suffering, betrayal, lies, unjust trial, torture and death are hard to confront even in a familiar story. And brutality is again a front of mind issue for us in a war nervous world.

Isaiah wrote,

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
... By a perversion of justice he was taken away
... For he was cut off from the land of the living."

The Romans had a particularly brutal means for such cutting off. And ever since Jesus, the imagery of Isaiah's poetry has been associated

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with the cross. Isaiah's writing was to Israel, the 'suffering servant' seen as an embodiment of the nation. Since early Christian writing, Isaiah's poetry has been used to help us understand Jesus, who characterises his people and lives out God's mission that's expressed here. Jesus takes the role of servant and suffers; the sign of this is the sign of the cross.

There's a profound relationship of meaning in these texts.

"he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed."

It's rich with poetic meaning, but... is this just about Jesus? Is there more to Jesus than this? How does the suffering of one help another? Tough issues from tough readings!

Both writers explore the dilemma of how God can be seen to deal with humanity and the problems of evil and death. In the broad sweep of John's gospel, Jesus has some long conversations heavy with theological overtones, he attends some festivals and gives some 'signs' of his mission. Jesus does his major work on the cross. Half the gospel; chapters 12 – 21 are the story of Holy Week, the cross and resurrection.

The cross was a brutal instrument of Roman law and order policy. In the occupied territories a strict 'zero tolerance' policy was often enforced. Enforcement for many meant death on a cross. But the sign of Roman domination has been remade by Jesus into a sign of transformation.

For the people of the early generations of the Church, repulsion was naturally part of how they saw the cross. This central Christian symbol, the cross, is a scandal. Paul makes that very clear. It's a reminder of the use of violent force. An ugly thing – repulsive, and yet! This was how Jesus was 'lifted up' – glorified, in John's telling.

The sign of the cross, symbol of brutal power, was also the epitome of Jesus' powerlessness and self-giving that leads to transcending death and a victory of unimaginable scope.

The cross reminds us that Jesus defeated death by entering into it. Jesus subverts brutal worldly power by submitting to it. The cross that we

meet around reminds us that God stands with those who are victims of brutality.

The readings lead us into the territory of our troubled humanity and what role our faith might play in shaping our response to it. So how can we respond to the tragedy and suffering of people today? The pattern we see in Jesus' cross, is one of confronting the worst and working through it.

It's profound that at the very centre of our faith is the story of suffering, death and resurrection. We must face the darkness, the endings, the reality in front of us. There can be no healing until suffering and death have been faced.

The whole thing is a scandal, brutal and unjust, but Jesus keeps dealing with it, he stays engaged, experiences the whole mess and identifies with the worst of our pain.

We are invited, through this story, to be people prepared to face our pains before God, and be prepared to stand alongside others in their times of need.

The cross is the sign of God with us. With us in the worst of life, giving a promise of the transformation of death into new life. The cross provides us a sign in which Jesus makes God known, present and active in transformation. Are we open to that?

**Singing: Jesus remember me
(TiS 730)**

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Responding: *Prayers for World & Community*

Transforming God, as you invite us into the reality that you are present in dark and difficult places, we offer our prayers for the world and community.

Our world continues to be troubled by war, disaster and pandemic. We pray for Ukraine, mindful of the broad and devastating impact of war. We especially remember innocent citizens of that country who are suffering loss and grief, for many without homes, food or even safe water to drink.

We pray for many facing natural disasters, and particularly for many in northern NSW and Queensland with the flood events of recent months. We pray too for people impacted in Gippsland with recent flooding of major rivers.

We pray for people who have faced multiple disasters, understanding that this compounds difficulties and hinders capacity to recover. COVID has stalled recovery for many impacted by bushfire. Flood events upon flood events have a similar impact.

COVID has been devastating for many on its own, and we pray for all who have lost loved ones or have struggled with isolation or through the challenge of navigating the pandemic.

We offer our prayers for the church as we encounter again the passion narrative of Jesus Christ. Help us anew to be people of the resurrection in a way that is lifegiving and offers hope for the world. Bless and guide our leaders, ministers, councils and members as we seek to walk the way of Christ.

We pray together now as Jesus invites 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.

Passing the peace

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

Offering

May all we offer in the way of Christ inspire us to bring light and life in his name. Bless these gifts and our lives as we hold this space until we celebrate our risen Lord together.

Notices

If you are having an offering today, you might consider putting that towards a special appeal such as support for Ukraine or flood relief.

Singing: From heaven you came. (TiS 256)

Sending Out

As an option you may wish to re-light the Christ candle and acknowledge that the light of Christ shines even in the darkest of places.

We leave today with the story incomplete. This time is liminal, unresolved, it leaves us bewildered, watching and waiting.

What questions remain with you? How does today shape your journey towards the cross and through it?

The blessing will wait for now, as this worship continues into the liminal space and until we gather again.

We depart in silence

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Beneath the Fig Tree:

a daily Lenten space:

For each day of Lent we have offered a bible reading and a comment or question for you to sit with. Here is the final one. Light a candle, journal the images and thoughts that come to you, listen to music, or simply sit in silence. The prayer words might remain with you for the day and open you to the needs of others and the yearnings within.

Saturday April 16th Read: John 19:38-42

Spend some time outside, in a garden or open space. Notice the sounds around you, see what grows from the earth, reaching to the sky. Take time to sit and be still, inviting the Spirit to rest on you and to bring comfort, patience and peace. You might like to plant some seeds, burying them in the soil, like a welcome, gentle womb of life.

Prayer words: garden / tomb

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