



**Weekly Worship**



**Pentecost 16**  
**Sunday September 17, 2023**

## Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Through the waters of the womb  
**we are birthed into the light.**  
Through the waters of baptism  
**we become one with Christ.**

We come today, ready to hear the call again  
to follow in the wild way of Jesus,  
**Carrying compassion and living forgiveness  
for ourselves, each other and all creation.**

Spirit of life,  
**you bring us, you bind us, you set us free,**  
We worship you,  
**Amen.**

*Light the candle - Christ is with us.*

## Acknowledging

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.



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander  
Christian Congress

## Singing: Our God, our help in ages past, TiS 47

*OR: O laughing light, O first-born of creation, TiS 255*



## Prayer

*Have there been times in your life when you have known the healing power of forgiveness, the release from being bound by hurt caused by others or yourself? Spend a few minutes in prayerful silence, bringing to mind those people, places, events and situations and offer them with gratitude to God. As a symbolic action, you may choose to invite people to gently move their hand through a bowl of water.*

*End the silence with these words:*

God who brought the people of Israel to freedom through the parting of the waters, we give you thanks for the freedom we have experienced through acts of forgiveness that flow from the generosity of your love.

And where we are bound by hurt,  
and where we are captive to hate,  
and where we are unable to meet in the middle,  
and where we cannot accept responsibility  
and where we cannot find release,

**Break open the waters of life  
and birth us into the deep and wide waters  
of your grace,  
then immersed, drenched and saturated,  
we may emerge as your people,  
forgiven and, forgiving  
walking together in hope and peace,  
in Jesus' name,  
Amen.**





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## Passing the peace

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

## Listening

**Read:** Exodus 14:19-31  
Matthew 18:21-35

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

## Reflecting

**Rev'd Ian Brown**

“Through the waters; freedom, forgiveness”

I'm sure God has a sense of humour, even in the face of serious issues. It's a great reliever of pressure. Moses and one of his old Egyptian friends chat at the edge of the sea as the waters are parted. There's a wistful moment, his mate says, “Well Moses, I guess we've come to a parting of the waves.” Yes, slavery was tough, but Moses begins to turn the tide here for his people! Sorry, the jokes are a bit 'wet', I know. It was the waves doing the 'standup routine'!

Let's clarify a little of the ground work. Howard Wallace, former First Testament Professor at our Centre for Theology and Ministry, assures us the

Hebrew text identifies this as the 'red sea'. Later tradition associated it with the 'red sea'. The story plots out something of a route with some place names, you can see it's not crossing the Red Sea!

The text actually tells us, 'a strong east wind blew all night and drove the water back', but then it goes on, 'Moses stretches out his hands to part the waters'. Even the text itself isn't straightforward. Scholars suggest this lack of clarity is the result of the weaving together of two earlier strands of the story to weave a patchwork whole.

Pharaoh pursues them after the Passover escape. 'Don't enter flood waters' is a basic principle. The Nile was a regular flooder, but in this story the army charges into the sea. What did they expect? Moses raises his staff and the waters crash back covering the chariots “and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.” It's a dramatic telling of escape from captivity. The story confronts us with issues of vengeance and attitudes to killing. Interesting that the lectionary pairs this story with Jesus teaching on forgiveness, where the parable has the villain of the story handed over for torture 'til he pays'!

The Exodus story goes on with a song of celebration. Paraphrasing, it reads; 'the horse and rider, thrown into the sea, yippee!' Glee at death always has a nasty odour. There's a heavy dash of ancient nationalism here, but Jewish tradition



*Reflecting continues*

*Weekly Worship. Season of Pentecost 2023. Presbytery of Gippsland, Fig Tree Worship Resource*



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



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*Reflecting continues*

speaks of God rebuking Miriam and Moses for their jubilation over the death of others. Perhaps we need to listen more carefully to such wisdom.

I wonder what's our response to the conflicts and calamities of our time, to the 'enemies' of our culture, to those who've caused us pain? Good question, isn't it? No, actually it's not a 'good' question! It's a sharply pertinent question. How best to respond to threats and to militarism, what to do about oversized egos in powerful positions? All timely questions.

In stark contrast to our conventional wisdom, Jesus says about the situation where we have been wronged; "forgive 70 x 7". It's Jesus' way of saying "don't bother counting the times you forgive."

Forgiveness is at the core of God's grace to us. Forgiveness is a practice of living in harmony with God's ways in our relationships. It's very much one of the ways we have of participating in the life of God's kingdom. Forgiveness and being reconciled are core values of this family that recognises Christ as its head.

None of this is easy in reality!

"Forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." We say this in our public worship. This is an issue for everyone! It's basic to the fabric of self and of community. There are no exceptions. Does Jesus say this forgiveness business is easy - NO! Does Jesus make hard demands on his disciples - YES!

Yes - but, at the very core of our faith is the truth that: "In Christ, God was reconciling the whole world to himself, not counting their sins against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us," us, the family of God. The work of Christ is described as reconciliation; bringing people together after difficulty and hurt. So it's our work too as the body of Christ. Sometimes the

place to start is with ourselves. Forgive others as we've been forgiven doesn't work well if we feel burdened by grievances or unrealistic expectations of ourselves.

In the practice of this hard discipline of forgiveness, just perhaps, there might be an experience of release – of Exodus, a new freedom through difficult waters; for us and for our community. That opportunity for new listening, dealing with old hurts and moving towards reconciliation and a better future has a familiar ring to it; perhaps we could do something towards that!

New freedom is more miraculous than 'read sea' crossings - and should be celebrated. Perhaps we just might understand one another better and get on more peacefully across our wonderfully diverse world, with more harmony and less need of forgiveness.

To God's glory, Amen

**Singing: Lord hear my praying**

**TiS 689** OR: *God of freedom ...TiS 657*





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## Offering

God of many surprises! Bless these gifts we bring. Bless them so that they may be used for ordinary things and also in ways we cannot comprehend, to bring about freedom and forgiveness, hope and healing, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

## Notices

**September 21st is the International Day of Peace.** Each year the International Day of Peace (IDP) is observed around the world on 21 September. The UN General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire. Never has our world needed peace more.

2023 marks the mid-point in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2023 observance of the International Day of Peace coincides with the SDG summit (18 – 19 September) to mark the midpoint milestone.

[International Day of Peace | United Nations](#)

## Responding: Prayers for World & Community

God of abundant grace,  
We hold before you in prayer these people, places and situations in need:

*Invite people to offer short prayers, (respecting privacy and confidentiality), with this response after each offering:*

God of grace, hear us,  
**Hear our prayer**

We pray for peace for all people,  
healing for the land,  
restored habitat for life and her creatures,  
freedom where there is enslavement  
hope where there is emptiness,

love where there is apathy,  
and surprises of the Spirit  
when the way ahead seems uncertain or lost.

We pray together, 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 for ever. Amen.**

**Singing: Guide me, O ... TIS 569**

*OR: Lord Jesus, we belong to you, TIS 686*





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## **Blessing**

Through the waters of the womb  
**we are born into the light.**  
Through the waters of baptism  
**we become one with Christ.**

We leave today, having heard the call again,  
to follow in the wild way of Jesus,  
**carrying compassion and living forgiveness  
for ourselves, each other and all creation.**

**Spirit of life,  
you send us, you bind us, you set us free.  
We worship you with all our life, Amen.**

## **Singing: This, this is the God we adore** TiS 220

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