



Worship@Home

5th Sunday in Lent

Sunday March 21, 2021

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

Psalm 51:10-12 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

As we light the candle
we wonder
at the gift
of being restored
with joy.

Call to worship

John 12:21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

We come to you, God of all,
longing to see Jesus,
Gather us in from our scattered lives,
with our fragmented faith
and our faltering steps.
Gather us in, nourish us with your Word
and bless us in this time together.

Let your Spirit show us the way
to lose our life in you
so that we can keep growing
into the joy of your eternal life
in the world where we are,
for the world where we are. Amen.

Acknowledging

As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. We do this every time we meet because it recognises the people whose land we occupy and it calls us again into the responsibilities of the covenant relationship between First and Second Peoples in the Uniting Church.



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress



Singing: Jesus calls us here TiS 477

Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where God's people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps the promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends

Jesus calls us to confess him,
Word of Life and Lord of All,
sharer of our flesh and frailness
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy, human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other:
found in him are no divides.
Race and class and sex and language
such are barriers he derides.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.

¹John Bell & Graham Maule





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Prayer

God of the covenant,
**for the blessing of life and the wonder
of love we give you thanks;**
for the mystery of the microbe
and the endless unfolding of the heavens
we give you thanks;
**for the gentle acts of kindness
and the gift of friends and family
we give you thanks;**

*You might want to add some more things
that pour out of your grateful heart.*

Have mercy on us, O God,
because we long to be your people:
full of kindness,
doing justice and walking humbly,
but so often we get it wrong:



Prayer refrain TiS 712

*Create in us a clean heart, O God.
Renew within us a right spirit.
Cast us not away from your presence, O Lord,
and take not your Holy Spirit from us.
Restore us to fullness of joy,
the joy that springs from your salvation.
Lighten our minds, shelter our lives
with your Spirit free.*

Forgive each of us
for the times we have turned away
for the ways we misuse power
for the words we speak that cause harm.
(prayer refrain)

Forgive our congregation, our nation, our world,
for the times we turn away
for the ways we misuse power
for the words we speak that cause harm.
(prayer refrain)

In the silence, create in us a clean heart,
O God.
(time of silence)

*In a reading from Jeremiah we hear these
words: No longer shall they teach one another,
or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they
shall all know me, from the least of them to the
greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their
iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*

Sisters and brothers in Christ, know this:
we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God, Amen.

²Digby Hannah

Listening

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34
John 12:20-33
For these words of faith
and for Jesus the Word:
Thanks be to God.





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Reflecting

Rev. Arnie Wierenga

I suspect few people respond well to getting things wrong. It is probably a life-long struggle for most of us, and like anything there is a great variety in the way we assume responsibility for our actions.

Many in churches will be influenced by the idea we were born sinful, and it is only by the grace of God that we might be forgiven for our iniquities. In our Western justice systems, transgressors will have a record of sins that are never erased, and I fear this idea seeps deeply into our personal and faith practices. Can we really forgive ourselves or others, despite forgiveness offered by God?

There are also many who refuse to take responsibility for anything. Politicians seem expert at covering iniquity, including spending large sums of tax-payer's money for political advantage, fast-tracking mining approvals just before elections, in systems of law and power that work best for those with the power to make laws ...

I long for the changes, hope and promise we hear in Jeremiah. The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

These prophetic words come at an interesting time in history. Back in Jeremiah's day, Israel and Judah are feeling the impact of a collapsing Assyrian regime. In its place is a rising battle between the superpowers - Egypt and Babylon. This may be ancient history, but patterns persist today as nations continue to act with power and self-interest.

The words of the Lord as recorded in Jeremiah speak of the need for something new and revolutionary. The new covenant (between God and the people of God) needs to break the patterns of human history, of human behaviour. We hear the distress of God as humans repeatedly fail or break the covenant relationship. It is as though we cannot help ourselves. We are consumed by greed, power, self-interest, and act as though the future is in our own hands and within our own power.

Given the repeating history of powers taking advantage of others - be they individual, institutional or superpower - a revolutionary circuit-breaker is needed. This is the promise in Jeremiah. This passage acts like a bridge between the Old and New testaments. The early church was clear that Jesus is the new covenant, and the New Testament bears witness to this.

Reflecting continues





Reflecting continues

We sense this from the gospel passage. Those from beyond the Jewish world come seeking Jesus and Jesus responds by indicating that his way is revolutionary. The way to rise above the powers of the world is through love's subversive surrender. Jesus says, 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.' At the end of Lent, as we gather momentum towards the death and resurrection of Jesus, we begin to see what he means. Jesus continues, 'when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself'.

From the other side of that first Easter, we can see that Jesus speaks of the cross, of death and life and the radical nature of the new covenant. The powers execute, but God exalts. Death has its way, but not the final say. Death becomes life, as buried grain sprouts and grows and bears fruit.

History repeats if none learn from it, or if we just hear history from the mouths of the powerful. When I despair at the state of the world, I look again to the new covenant. There I see life, love, justice and wholeness fully present. Through Jesus comes a knowing of God. Through death comes life. In the risen Christ we find the ways of God written deeply within. When we despair at the state of the world, remember that we are part of a revolution based on love, and therein lies our hope.

Responding: Prayers for the World & Community

God of freedom, justice and life,
knowing that we are your people,
and you are our God,
we bring to you the prayers of our hearts:

Bless the earth, the air and the waters,
bearing the burden of our greed and gain.

Come, Spirit of life, bring renewal.

Bless all creatures, constantly adapting
to the dynamic and changing environment.

Come, Spirit of life, give them shelter.

Bless people who are struggling
with diseases of mind, body and spirit,

Come Spirit of life, ease their pain.

Bless those whose countries are at war,
with each other, or across borders

Come, Spirit of life, bring peace.

Bless those who have lost what matters most,
hope, connection, purpose, loved ones

Come, Spirit of life, gather them in.

Bless the young, the aged and the middling,
making loving lives in a challenging world

Come, Spirit of life, bring wisdom.

Bless us all, longing to be your people,
as we pray the prayer that 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.**

Passing the peace

Peace be with you:
and also with you.

Offering

We make our offering trusting that what we bring, our money, our time, our gifts and ourselves, will be useful to you, Spirit of life. Infuse these gifts with hope and healing, that they may be used in ways that support the work of the church and bring your joy-filled life to us and to others. God of the covenant, remind us again to lose our lives in your service, and to find our lives in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.





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Notices

We may be coming to the end of Lent, but it's not too late to get involved in the Uniting World Lent Event - check it out here: <https://donate.unitingworld.org.au/event/lent-event>

Singing: When Christ was lifted TiS 248

Can be sung to the familiar tune: WILTSHIRE TiS 112

When Christ was lifted from the earth
his arms outstretched above
through every culture, every birth,
to draw an answering love.

Still east and west his love extends
and always, near or far,
he calls and claims us as his friends
and loves us as we are.

Where generation, class or race
divides us to our shame,
he sees not labels, but a face,
a person and a name.

Thus freely loved, though fully known,
may I in Christ be free
to welcome and accept his own
as Christ accepted me.

³Brian Arthur Wren, Leonard Blake

Word of mission

Go and be people of the covenant;
**restored in our living,
and sure of God's promises.**

Go and be people of the covenant;
bound to each other and to God.

Go and be people of the covenant;
**sharing the joy of our hearts
and living for justice and peace.**

Blessing

The love of God enfold you,
the wisdom of Christ enlighten you,
and the fire of the Spirit inflame you;
and may the blessing of the Triune God
rest upon you and abide with you,
now and evermore. **Amen.**

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