



Gathering & Lighting the Candle

Psalm 111 begins: Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

If you are gathered with others, look around. You are in the 'company of the upright'. The congregation. The living, breathing, body of Christ.

If you are by yourself, you are connected through Christ to others who are gathered in worship. You are also in the 'company of the upright'. The congregation. The living, breathing, body of Christ.

Light the candle, let love fill your heart.

Call to worship

As we gather this Sunday to worship, we remember Jesus and his disciples gathering in the synagogue in Capernaum, and all our brothers and sisters around the world gathering to worship.

**We are blessed
by being part of the family of God.**

May we listen for what God may say to us or show us this day.

May we be open to the unexpected.

May we be open to being called.

May we be open to being blessed.

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and waters where we are. This resource comes from the land of the Bunurong and Gunai Kurnai people. We pay respect to elders past, present and emerging and commit ourselves to truth telling and justice as we walk together in love.

Singing - O Christ, the healer

TIS 638

can be sung to: TALLIS' CANON

O Christ, the healer, we have come to pray for health, to plead for friends. How can we fail to be restored, when reached by love that never ends?

From every ailment flesh endures our bodies clamor to be freed; yet in our hearts we would confess that wholeness is our deepest need.

How strong, O Lord, are our desires, how weak our knowledge of ourselves! Release in us those healing truths unconscious pride resists or shelves.

In conflicts that destroy our health, we diagnose the world's disease; our common life declares our ills: is there no cure, O Christ, for these?

Grant that we all, made one in faith, in your community may find the wholeness that, enriching us, shall reach the whole of humankind.

Frederick Pratt Green 1903-

TIS 638. Used with permission. CCLI 241 739

Prayer

Inspired by Psalm 111

Praise God! Yes, I will!

Together we thank you, with our whole hearts.

We see your creative works,
we dwell on them, and they fill us with delight.

We wonder at the depth of your great goodness

**and the way you keep reaching for us,
without holding back.**

People know the wonderful things you do,

the essence of your grace and mercy

You feed those who hunger for you.

You do not forget us,

through all the generations, in every land.

Prayer continues ...

Worship@Home: Epiphany 4. The Fig Tree Worship resource; Presbytery of Gippsland



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



31 January 2021 – Epiphany 4

Prayer continued ...

Your work is hallmarked by justice
and we trust your teachings
**because they are the eternal foundation
that keeps us strong and steady.**
You send us blessing and forgiveness
and your covenant will hold through all time.
Holy and Awesome is your name

We tremble in your presence,
as you walk with us in wisdom.
**All creation sings a hymn of praise.
we lend our voices to join the song.**

Praise God! Yes, I will!

O God,
you know us better than we know ourselves.
We can deceive others and deceive ourselves,
but we can never deceive you.
Help us look at our lives with honesty,
and bring before you
the things we need to confess,
trusting in your love and forgiveness.
Let us in silence confess those things which are
on our hearts...

**Forgive us and restore us.
Help us trust in your abundant grace.
Help us be open to being transformed by you
into the people you would have us be.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Listening

Read: Mark 1:21-28

For these words of faith,
and for Jesus the Word:

Thanks be to God.

Reflecting - Rev. Jennie Gordon

What is this?

Sitting on the grass with one of the youngest members of our family, I picked up a stick and planted it in the soft ground. He laughed. We tried to balance twigs, grasses and leaves on top of the stick, but they kept falling off and he laughed even more. We didn't need to use spoken language, didn't need to correctly name each thing or place them in the whole created order of things, didn't even need to discuss the laws of gravity, we just enjoyed the delightful surprise of a simple, shared, earthy experience. Sometimes I think that we speak too much and too soon.

It was usual, in those days, according to the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* for people to walk into the synagogue and begin teaching. As it was the sabbath there was probably a worship service underway. The synagogue, in contrast to the temple, was a public space in the Jewish community where virtually anyone could be a leader. There would have been a wide range of worshipers, male and female and the reading of the Torah would have been central, along with hymns, sermons, common prayer, translations of ancient texts and poetry. So, there is nothing out of the ordinary about the beginning of this story from the gospel of Mark.

However, people are astounded at the authority held in Jesus' teaching. As if they needed a demonstration, a man with an unclean spirit appears amongst them. Through this unnamed man we will hear the first recognition of Jesus as the Holy One of God, a phrase applied to Elijah in 2 Kings 4:9. There is a cry from the spirit in the man, who uses 'us' instead of 'me' as he questions Jesus. This encounter is not between one man and another, it is between the forces of darkness and the one true light that has come into the world.

Reflection continues ...

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Reflection continued ...

Now we are knee deep in mystery, and we're about to go in over our heads! The conversation where Jesus rebukes and silences the spirit is a narrative structure that is found in other Jewish and pagan sources, recognisable to the first hearers of the gospel. "Be muzzled," he says to the spirit, "and come out of him!" And it did. We don't talk much about unclean spirits these days, but we do talk about addiction, and other mental health struggles where the self is invaded by damaging thoughts and actions. Where healing is about restoring people to their whole self, to who I am.

Here's where the questions begin to flow from the amazed onlookers (and us). "What is this?" Something mysterious and new is happening. One with authority and power over unclean spirits is in their synagogue. "What is this?" Do you notice that Jesus does not answer them? He is recognised for who he is by the forces of darkness, but the people who he has come to bring to life, remain firmly in the dark. "What is this?" Jesus leaves them in their wondering, in the mystery of the encounter, to ponder the hiddenness of the holy. Sometimes I think that we speak too much and too soon.

So, it begins. Word gets around that there's a healer in town. Driving south of Hobart there's a sign that invites people to a local church with something like: "Need a miracle? Come at 7pm each Wednesday." I've never known miracles to keep to a schedule like that, but it's provocative... and possibly dangerous, but who knows? There's one style of evangelism that offers all the answers and we only need to turn up with a notepad and pencil and we will be able to live amongst the chosen, but I'd rather the kind of evangelism that provokes questions and invites us to engage in the deep, earthy mystery of our obscure and enigmatic God.

May you often find yourself in a state of amazement at the wonders that life is showing you, as you walk as disciples of Christ and may you utter, frequently; "What is this?"

Responding - Prayers for World & Community

As we remember the compassion and love of Jesus who healed the man with the unclean spirit, we bring our prayers for others and ourselves.

We pray for our world – for peace in Syria and all war-torn countries. We pray for UNICEF and other agencies caring for refugees, and for generosity by governments in offering re-settlement.

We pray for communities ravaged by bushfires, cyclones, flooding, and other disasters. We pray for generosity and compassion for those in need.

We pray for the fight against COVID 19. We pray for healing of the sick, for safety for medical, health and quarantine staff, for medical researchers, and for those overseeing vaccination programs.

We pray for teachers, principals and students at the beginning of this school year. We pray that 2021 will be fulfilling and a time of great learning and growth.

We pray for our politicians and leaders. We pray that they may lead with integrity, compassion and wisdom, putting aside ego and self-interest.

We pray, too, for those who we know and love that need your help and healing. We name them now.....

And we pray for ourselves, that we may always trust in your name, as we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples:

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.

Prayer continues ...

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31 January 2021 – Epiphany 4

Prayer continued ...

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

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

Offering

Bless what we bring, God of abundance.
Bless our gifts of money, time and energy.
Bless us as we seek to be your people,
walking together in the mystery of love. Amen.

Singing - What a friend we have TIS 590

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Jesus is our only refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In his arms he'll take and shield you,
You will find a solace there.

w: Joseph Medlicott Scriven 1918-86 m: William Penfro Rowlands 1860-1937 - TIS 590. Used with permission. CCLI 241 739

Blessing

May you keep your hearts and minds open
and often find yourselves
in the presence of mystery.

May you keep asking the questions
that lead you along the path of life,
walking with the one who calls you to follow.

May you be quick to wonder
and slow to speak.

May you be bearers of the light
that is not defeated by darkness.

Go in the power of God,
One in Three and Three in One.
Behind, before, within,
now and forever, Amen.

*Presbytery of Gippsland
Editor: Rev. Jennie Gordon*



pastoral.ucaqipps@gmail.com

Contributors:

Rev. Sandra Houghton (Sale - Supply ministry)
Rev. Jennie Gordon (Presbytery Minister)

Worship@Home: Epiphany 4. The Fig Tree Worship resource; Presbytery of Gippsland



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