



Order of Service
20th March 2022
Lent 3

INTROIT TiS 703 As the deer pants

Call to worship (based on Psalm 63)

You, God, are our God,
earnestly we seek you;
we thirst for you,
we long for you with our whole selves.
We are like drought-cracked earth
desperately hoping for rain.
We have seen you in this place, with these people,
seen your power and your glory.
Your love is better than life,
and so we glorify you;
as long as we live, we praise you;
with our voices and our bodies, we praise you. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Good and gracious God,
we seek you.
We thirst for you.
Without your presence,
we are as a dry and weary land with no water.

Together, we lift up our spirits and call on your name
that you might abide with us.
Bless this our worship of you,
that we might sing for joy
under the shadow of your wings. **Amen.**

Acknowledgement of First Peoples

"We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather today and pay respect to their elder's past, present and emerging."

WELCOME

Hymn TiS 152 Joyful, joyful, we adore

Psalm 63

Comfort and Assurance in God's Presence
A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

¹O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

²So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.



³ Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

⁵ My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips

⁶ when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;

⁷ for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

⁸ My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND PRAISE

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

This is the season of turning. We are called on this journey to turn our lives to the Lord, to turn away from all those things which have harmed us and others; to separate ourselves from actions and attitudes that demean and destroy. It is far too easy for us to sink into the mire of self-pity and self-serving attitudes, wondering why everything isn't coming our way. We want comfort, contentment, no stress, no struggle. Yet our lives are filled with stress and discontent.

We hurt, Lord. We hurt in our bodies and our souls. We hurt in our relationships with others. How we must try your patience! We don't want to be like this - we want to feel the warmth of your love, the freedom of your spirit, the joy of serving you. Forgive us for our selfishness and stupidity. Heal us. For we ask these things in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

You are given another chance! God has heard your cries. Turn again to the Lord. Find comfort and strength in God's eternal love for you. Be healed. AMEN.

An Early Word

Hymn TiS 164 The great love of God

**BIBLE READINGS: Isaiah 55:1-9
Luke 13:1-9**

REFLECTION

What did they do to deserve that?

Have you ever asked that question – seeking to understand another's misfortune, or even your own? What did I do to deserve that?

Perhaps this very question was bothering people as they told Jesus some terrible news. Pilate – the same Pontius Pilate who oversaw the crucifixion of Jesus – had slaughtered some Galilean Jews. Making Pilate's appalling action even more offensive is that he did this terrible thing while they were offering their sacrifices in Jerusalem. It's Jesus who asks the questions on everyone's minds: Is it because those Galileans were worse sinners than other Galileans that this happened to them? Did they do something to deserve such an awful death? And it's Jesus who gives the answer: No.

When the tower of Siloam fell and eighteen people were killed, crushed because they stood in the wrong place at the time, is that because they were sinners? Jesus says no.



On a different occasion some people asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither.” said Jesus, and he cured the man of his blindness. Jesus denied a correlation between the man’s problem and someone’s sin.

What did he do to deserve this? It’s a persistent question, and it goes with a persistent assumption, that somehow what people get in life is what they deserve – that there must be a connection between the sorts of people they are and the bad or good things that come their way in life. We’ve heard people say, “I wonder what he did to deserve that?” or make pronouncements, “this plague or natural disaster or even war is God’s punishment for their sin.”

Imagine anyone even thinking that the people of Ukraine are being punished in this terrible and totally unjust war because they’ve sinned in some way. Or that the recent floods wrought their devastation to punish the populace because they’d done something wrong.

NO says Jesus, NO, that’s not how it works. Sometimes we do suffer as a direct result of some wrong we have done, some bad decision, some action we’ve neglected to take and we suffer the consequences. Mistreat your body, and you will get hurt or sick. Mistreat a friend, and you may damage your friendship. The negative consequences of our actions can be clear. But sometimes we’re confused, especially when we believe we’ve done all the right things, tried hard, and still we suffer. As Christians, we really shouldn’t be so surprised when this happens. The idea that only good things happen to good people should have been put to rest when Jesus was nailed to the cross.

Christian faith is no automatic protection against tragedy. The cross is our central symbol – the cross, where an innocent man died the death of a criminal. Nonetheless, Christians have long wondered why bad things happen to people, even good people. In his book *The City of God*, St. Augustine considered the great suffering that occurred when the barbarians sacked Rome, and he noted that when the barbarians raped and pillaged, Christians suffered just as much as non-Christians. Faith in Christ did not make them immune to pain and tragedy. Augustine wrote, “Christians differ from Pagans, not in the ills which befall them, but in what they *do* with the ills that befall them.” The Christian faith does not give us a way around tragedy. Faith gives us a way through tragedy. So, no we can’t look at tragedy and assume that someone did something to deserve it.

“But,” Jesus says, “unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.”
What kind of a reply is that?

Jesus is telling us that there’s a much better question to ask that “what did I do to deserve this suffering?” The much more important question is: how is my relationship with God? Jesus is saying - don’t be distracted by looking at why something might have happened. Instead, look at yourself – while you still have time. Jesus refuses to get caught up in the question of whether or not someone else deserves to suffer, and instead asks another question: What in your life needs repenting, acknowledging, and turning around? What needs to be turned over to God? What needs to be forgiven?

The astonishing truth at the heart of our faith is that God already loves us. We don’t need to do anything to earn God’s love. We can’t do anything to deserve God’s love. God already sees us as God’s beloved. All we have to do is live and explore the amazing mystery of our acceptance. We can’t lose God’s favour and make bad things happen to us because we don’t earn God’s favour in the first place. When those around Jesus want to gossip and cast aspersions on another’s character, Jesus basically says, “I need you to redirect your questions to yourself – not as an end unto itself, but as a process to make yourselves whole before God.” In other words, Jesus ask those gathered to stop worrying about the big philosophical questions like why bad things happen to good people, and instead ask questions that matter: How can I change my own behaviors and patterns so that I not only reflect God’s glory, but also begin to produce fruit?

Which leads us to the next story in our gospel passage. Jesus goes on to tell a story about an unproductive fig tree that the owner wants to cut down. The gardener pleads the trees case, begging for one more year to aerate the soil, to get his hands dirty with manure to help nourish the tree. The gardener does not give up on the unproductive tree, but instead offers to go even further, to massage the environment in an effort to create a total change in this tree. As one scholar suggests, “The manure around our roots is the very blood of the one who

pleads for our justification before God, the one through whom we may offer up the fruits of the kingdom to our Creator.”

Isn't that amazing – that God continues to wait, continues to tend, continues to bear with us, all the time encouraging us to turn from our desire for order and safety and security and live into the potential we have to love each other. There is yet more time – not all the time in the world, as we also will at some point die as did those who died by tragedy. Yet, just now, there is still more time: more time to turn, more time to love, more time to give, more time to live into the way of relationship God intends. For this we say – thanks be to God.

Hymn TiS 588 In heavenly love abiding

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DEDICATION OF OFFERING

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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.*

HYMN: TiS 611 God of grace and God of glory (to tune TiS 142)

Blessing

We have been nourished and nurtured in this community of faith,
so now we go into our ordinary lives confident in the power of God's goodness
to work its way in the world.

Go in the love and with the encouragement of the Spirit.

***We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. Amen.***

HYMN TiS 782 Go now in peace

