



## CALL TO WORSHIP

Today the ancient journey begins again,  
taking us on into the future

Let us keep watch together for  
in the darkness light is growing  
into the darkness signs are pointing

***Advent is here, let us travel together  
towards the new birth, towards the new start  
following the signs which show us the way***



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## OPENING RESPONSES

The journey begins again and we are invited to travel

***Taking each step will be an adventure***

The journey begins again let us walk it together

***Each of us part of the community of seekers***

The journey begins again, let us trust the new life it brings

***New life for you and for me and for all the world***

## LIGHTING THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE: HOPE

### Read Partner Story from Tonga: For Climate Action

Climate Change is making storms more intense. Finau has lived many years on Tonga's 'Eua island, so when she says that Cyclone Gita was the worst she had experienced, it is the truth. The cyclone damaged the front of her home. Her husband is not well. Thankfully, the women in her local Ama Takiloa group have been a lifeline for her. They have repaired rainwater harvesting systems and are replanting community gardens so they will be able to eat traditional foods like taro again. **Be the Lifeline to communities facing the worst effects of climate change.**

### Lighting the Advent Candle of Hope

For those whose dreams are squashed,  
For those whose life is very hard,  
For those who despair for the future,  
We light the candle of hope.

*Light the candle*

**You, Lord Jesus, are our hope, and the hope for our world.**

**May this light signal a breakthrough, a brighter future,**

**A new order and a better way.**

## THE READINGS

**Jeremiah 33:14-16:** Jeremiah is imprisoned (v.1) for buying a field while the city of Jerusalem is under siege to the Babylonians. It is a time for catastrophe for Judah, no longer under the protection of the Assyrian empire. Babylon ultimately gains control from Egypt. Jeremiah promises healing and safety for his people. Amid their terrible suffering, tells them to 'execute justice and righteousness' (v.15) will save the land and provide safety to Jerusalem.

**Psalms 25: 1-10:** The psalmist cries out in distress to God and waits for God's guidance with hope. In doing so, the writer affirms the steadfast love and faithfulness of God.

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-13:** Paul's letter of Thessalonians is marked by its words of warmth and encouragement. Reading them as a message for today, Paul encourages us to be concerned for each other (v. 12) – a commitment we must make on a global scale to combat climate change.

**Luke 21: 25-36:** Luke offers us words of warning and hope. The language of climate change is often apocalyptic – alerting us to the danger of complacency. These words of destruction may not be easy to hear as we make preparations for Christmas, but for many people the threat of apocalypse is a daily reality. Let us stand with them this Christmas, alive in the hope we find together, knowing God's kingdom or rule is near (v.31).

## SERMON NOTES



On the first Sunday of Advent, it is time to take stock. The readings of violence and end times we find in the Scriptures, remind us of the deep roots of faith that have helped people through all manner of suffering and catastrophe. Some has been personal but much has been collective as people have looked to God and each other for the strength to get through troubled times.

Listening to stories from other places, serves to remind us of the interconnectedness of life and as a call to action.

- Where do we find hope this Advent?
- Who is in need of justice?

- How can we advocate for more action to stop rising temperatures and help people already affected?

## **PARTNER STORY: BE THE LIFELINE TO DISASTER SURVIVORS**

Finau has lived on Tonga's 'Eua island for many years, so when she says Tropical Cyclone Gita was the worst storm she had experienced, it is the truth.

On the night Gita struck her home, Finau and her husband prayed without ceasing. More so when they realised parts of their house were being torn off by the high winds. When morning came and the danger had passed, she assessed the damage. Her two rainwater tanks were intact but the front of the house was badly damaged.

Later, members of her local Ama Takiloa group came to check on her, knowing her husband was unwell and may need help.

For Finau, being part of a group where people care and look out for each other helped her cope with a disaster she never imagined.

Cyclone Gita made landfall on February 13. Two people lost their lives in the storm. With winds reaching 233 kilometres an hour, it affected more than 70,000 people on the islands of Tongatapu and 'Eua. Homes and livelihoods were destroyed – 70-80% of fruit trees came down.

Almost one year after Cyclone Gita, many families are living in temporarily repaired homes with little assistance.

Thank you to all those who joined the lifeline with their donations to the Cyclone Gita Appeal. Tongans replanted gardens, repaired and replaced rainwater harvesting systems, provided community water tanks, and established home chicken farms after the storm.

## **Be the Lifeline to communities facing the worst effects of climate change.**

### **AMA TAKILOA**

Ama Takiloa is a network of more than 300 women's groups offering training and support at the village level, and a partner of CWS. Most have 8 to 12 members and are supported by regular visits from Ama Takiloa trainers. The groups meet monthly and undertake activities such as making large tapa and mats, and working on demonstration gardens.

Together the women have learned new skills and developed markets for their products. Regular inspections by group members encourage pride in their homes and gardens but offers the opportunity to share knowledge and advice. Village-based they can be relied upon to know what is happening and who needs help. After the main response to Cyclone Gita, members systematically visited households and found the aid effort was very uneven.

In recent years planning and preparing in case of disaster have been important parts of the training programme. The women have used this knowledge to deal with Cyclone Ian that caused damage in the Ha'apai and Vava'u groups in January 2014. A few months after a major replanting programme, drought killed large sections of their flourishing gardens. Members have participated in national training exercises, including a tsunami simulation exercise supported by CWS and other agencies. The Tongan National Emergency Management Office continues to run training exercises to prepare communities for tsunami and other disasters. Working with government, Ama Takiloa members can play an important part in their communities.

Food security is an important issue for the women. The changed weather patterns and rising sea levels are threatening their gardens and livelihoods. Work on the community gardens enables them to learn new techniques to apply at home. They have turned to old methods and crops that are cheaper to grow. In response, trainers have been encouraging members to grow drought resistant Giant Taro and other traditional foods that are often more nutritious and less costly than more recent arrivals. Members now grow their own pandanus grass and mulberry for making traditional products.

Another area of expertise is water. Ama Takiloa women have learnt to manage and repair their own rainwater tanks rather than depend on the some times costly and unreliable public systems. In drought prone areas they use gray water for gardens.

## SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION



The 2018 Appeal puts the spotlight on our responsibilities to each other and the planet our home. In 2015, the United Nations agreed to a new agenda for sustainable development made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Goal 13 is a commitment to [take action](#) on climate change by strengthening local resilience and enabling communities to adapt to climate-related risks and natural disaster in all countries. Climate mitigation, adaption, reduction and disaster risk reduction strategies are part of this goal which includes a US\$100 billion global fund for developing countries needing assistance to meet the Paris Agreement as well as providing specialised support to small island and least developed states.

In October the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [reported](#) there is only 12 years to make the changes necessary to keep global temperature rise to 1.5°C and avoid catastrophic environmental breakdown. Urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts is very important for Tonga. Sea level rise averages 6 mm per year, above the global average. Rain is less frequent but much heavier and therefore more dangerous when it comes. Its 36 inhabited islands are more vulnerable to disaster: cyclone, drought, flooding and tsunami.

Cyclone season runs from November 1 to April 30. Tropical cyclones [are](#) low pressure systems which form over warm waters with gale force winds. In severe cyclones winds exceed 64 knots or 118 kilometres per hour. Each year an average of four cyclones [occur](#) in the western Pacific and seven in the east.

## AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

*We trust that patient waiting  
through times of gestation brings newness of life;  
That the transformation of our lives  
is made up of many small (and sometimes larger) advents,  
periods of waiting followed by a birth,  
our own lives becoming the 'rough stable'  
in which Christ can be born again and again.*

*We have experienced that many  
can then be attracted by that indefinable mystery  
by the numinosity of the moment  
by the irresistible appeal;*

*Captivated by just a baby of an idea  
by pregnant promise  
or the childlike vulnerability of the moment  
which reassures us we are understood  
at the deepest depths of our being -  
the depths where this new life gestates  
and from where it is birthed.  
We trust, we experience, but it is all still a mystery!*

## PRAYERS FOR OUR PARTNERS

Creator God, praise and thanksgiving echo from many voices,  
Yet this bountiful world is broken by our human actions:  
The climate is being changed,  
The soil is being washed away,  
The seas are being polluted with what we throw away.

The islands of the Pacific are threatened in so many ways,  
Yet we live in hope  
That caring people will work together  
To mend the damage.

We pray for the many,  
Like Finau of Tonga and her family,  
That their hope will be strengthened  
By our giving and standing beside them.

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This is our prayer in the name of Jesus – the Hope of the world.

## SENDING FORTH

We travel together

towards the new birth, towards the new start

We follow the signs which show us the way

***To do what is right***

***To seek justice***

***To walk humbly with God.***

***We go in peace. Amen.***

## NOTES

Special thanks to Rev Dr Susan Jones for the opening liturgies, and Rev Clare Lind and the people of Tawa Union for the candelighting, prayers for partners, and the Hope banner. Under the leadership of Roy Bridge who has a background in emergency management and response, the people created the banner. The blue tarpaulin backdrop is the primary symbol - blue of the sea/clear sky after a storm. The secondary symbol is of temporary shelter used after natural disasters such as cyclones. The Life ring O links with the lifeline (rope), connecting the four symbols.

**Join the Lifeline so all people have food, water, dignity and lives free of violence. Leave no one behind. Support the [Christmas Appeal](#).**

