

London Conference Congregational Worship Service
Sunday, May 30, 2010

This Service was prepared by: London Conference Division of
World Outreach Committee

Throughout this year, London Conference President Doug Wright invited Presbyteries and Congregations to explore the theme of exile as a model for understanding our present situation as the church today and as a means of restoring hope.

Closely connected with the 2007-2009 Mission Theme of Challenging Empire: A Call to Community, Doug encouraged us to share the ways in which we are faithfully singing the Lord's song in a time of great challenge. Many of these stories are being shared and celebrated this weekend at our conference gathering.

In this year's London Conference Congregational Worship Service, encouraged by the stories and songs being sung across this Conference, we have blended together our 'Song of Faith' and the current 2009 – 2011 Mission Theme, "Living for the Earth" as yet another invitation to consider faithful living that fosters the flourishing of all creation.

The service is divided into four sections entitled Gratitude, Lament, Seeing with New Eyes and Living for the Earth. Each section begins with a short meditation followed by a portion from the 'Song of Faith' and a hymn. There are additional options according to your needs and preferences.

We offer this service as a guide, a framework and encourage you to be creative and most of all enjoy as the Spirit shapes this time together. May you be blessed during this time of worship, joyfully singing songs of faith and sharing in the rich spiritual gifts given for the living out of this life in Christ.

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

HYMN OF REJOICING

This is the Day VU # 412
Morning Has Broken VU# 409

GRATITUDE

MEDITATION

What can one say about gratitude? Type into Google 'quotes on gratitude' and you'll soon find that there are plenty. Quote after quote about this something called 'gratitude' from revered poets, philosopher's, spiritual leaders, scientists and more, both past and present. A common thread runs through each attempt to capture its essence. Gratitude is life giving, joy making and is magnified when we wonder at the goodness of creation. Here's a quote from a name you'll know. I often see him quoted on outdoor church signs. "Gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder," G.K. Chesterton.

One cannot help but wonder at the beauty of God's earth. The sights, the sounds, the smells, that gift us daily. The rush of the day and our pre-occupations can often distance us from its inspiration. Remember the Becel commercial with the woman rushing down the sidewalk with her groceries. She loses her grip on one of the bags and down it goes, spilling its contents. One of the items lands near a rose bush with a rose in full bloom. The woman is swept up in a moment of wonder. Transported to 'gratitude central'. She breathes a little easier. We've been there, known that.

The natural world has always inspired us, bringing forth our gratitude, our songs and our silence. Without its flourishing, it is the end of living and the beginning of survival. As we prepare to hear from our 'Song of Faith' I want to get you primed and ready with a few lines from an Irving Berlin song from 1946 that speaks about gratitude and its deep connection to the natural world.
(read or sung)

Got no check books, got no banks, still I'd like to express my
THANKS – I've got the sun in the morning, and the moon at night.

READING FROM 'A SONG OF FAITH' (single reader suggested)

We sing thanksgiving. Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery, of living things,
 diverse and interdependent, of complex patterns of growth and evolution,
 of subatomic particles and cosmic swirls
 we sing of God the Creator, the Maker and Source of all that is.
 Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator, who is both in creation and beyond it. All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.
 All creation is good.

CHILDREN'S TIME

Inform the children that you have brought some of God's creation with you today. Inside a bag or container you have articles from nature (stone/rock, sand, pine needle, flower, branch...). Explain that you'd like them to take a close look. (use a magnifying glass). Be sure each child gets a chance looking through it. Ask them what they see.

Have the children look at the palm of their hand with the magnifying glass and explain that God made each of us too, just like the stone and the flower. Explain that if God made all these things and God made us then we related. These items from the earth are our relatives. Do you know what a relative is? (sister, brother, cousin, uncle...)

Encourage the children to remember that each time they eat a meal, play with their pet, or walk on the earth they are touching a part of God's 'good' creation. When we remember and give thanks it seems we just naturally take better care of the earth and ourselves.

STORYBOOKS

Children of the Earth..... Remember by Schim Schimmel

Check www.childrenoftheearth.org for other possible selections

OPTION SELECTION: Invite the congregation to turn in their seats and form small groups of 2 – 4 persons. Tell them that you are going to start a sentence and they are invited to finish the sentences in as many ways as they would like, sharing their sentences with the other folks in their group.

Encourage them NOT to start discussing until everyone has had a chance to finish the sentence several times! Be sure to give them enough time to share their thoughts without dragging it out too long! You will feel the energy in the room and know what is the right amount of time. If you feel certain that your congregation will not feel comfortable with this option then try inserting paper into the bulletin and having them write their responses for their own reflection. Here are the open sentences.

I feel that the earth is good when.....

I experience beauty and mystery in the world of nature when.....

I experience God in creation when.....

HYMN

Touch the Earth Lightly VU 307

All Things Bright and Beautiful VU 291

This Is God's Wondrous World VU 296

Teach Me God to Wonder VU 299

Called by Earth and Sky MV

LAMENT

MEDITATION

The hymn 'Amazing Grace' written by John Newton is one of the most recognizable songs in the English speaking world, sung over 10 million times annually according to Jonathon Aitken, a Newton biographer. Within it's lyrics we hear that 'hot on the heels' of amazement comes the stinging awareness of how lost we have become. Our amazement at the artistry of creation and

our place in it calls us into the painful recognition of how far off the track our relationships have gone, with God, with one another, with the earth and all its inhabitants. It takes courage to let the truth sink in, to risk giving yourself and your song over to this something called 'lament'.

It is in this stark reality that we can easily hang up our instruments, succumb to the jeers that our song had no further use, and reminisce about days gone by OR we can be met by God in our tears, allowing lament its rightful place as a powerful step on the path toward renewed vision and strength, and to a new and deeper relationship with God. Let us risk lament together as we listen to the words of our 'Song of Faith' as they sing of how lost we have become.

READING FROM 'A SONG OF FAITH' (suggest two or more readers)

Made in the image of God,
 we yearn for the fulfillment that is life in God.
 Yet we choose to turn away from God.
 We surrender ourselves to sin,
 a disposition revealed in selfishness, cowardice, or apathy.
 Becoming bound and complacent
 in a web of false desires and wrong choices,
 we bring harm to ourselves and others.
 This brokenness in human life and community
 is an outcome of sin.
 Sin is not only personal
 but accumulates
 to become habitual and systemic forms
 of injustice, violence, and hatred.
 We are all touched by this brokenness:
 the rise of selfish individualism
 that erodes human solidarity;
 the concentration of wealth and power
 without regard for the needs of all;
 the toxins of religious and ethnic bigotry;
 the degradation of the blessedness of human bodies

and human passions through sexual exploitation;
 the delusion of unchecked progress and limitless growth
 that threatens our home, the earth;
 the covert despair that lulls many into numb complicity
 with empires and systems of domination.
 We sing lament and repentance.

OPTIONAL SELECTION: Share with the congregation that there are many ways in which we fail to live for the earth and thereby bring harm to ourselves and others. One of the areas of harm caused is the way our species has been involved in the extinction of many other species. Play a recording of Bruce Cockburn's 'Beautiful Creatures'. Invite the congregation to listen and reflect on their experiences of and feelings about species extinction. Allow at least 30 seconds of silence after the song has ended.

SCRIPTURE SUGGESTIONS

Isaiah 40:1-11

PSALM 137 VU 858 (option: to be sung as hymn 'By the Babylonian Rivers' VU 859)

ROMANS 8 vs. 22

John 1:1-14

HYMN

By the Babylonia Rivers VU 859

The Earth and All Who Breathe VU 295

SEEING WITH NEW EYES

MEDITATION

There's nothing quite like a good cry especially in the company of fellow mourners. The science of tears show that they bring healing to body, mind and spirit. Did you know that tears expel stress releasing hormones that can build up, compromising your immune system? Our healthy lament filled with the tears of

humanity's wrong choices have their place in cleansing our vision and freeing us just enough to see new life in the desolation. To see the single seedling or sapling, strong and healthy, in the midst of a burned-out forest.

We carry on with tear stained cheeks seeing differently. We see through the lens of hope, more attentive to the wisdom that animates the flower, the stone, the human heart. We feel the creative Spirit lifting us up from our knees and sending us out to sing the Lord's song with new melodies, new purpose.....once blind, but now seeing.

OPTIONAL SELECTION (one reader – read slowly - co-ordinate with music if possible)

Pass around the articles of nature that were used during the children's story during the reading of the poem. Encourage the congregation to enjoy them as the children did earlier.

Love all Creation,
The whole of it and every grain of sand
Love every leaf
Every ray of God's light
Love the animals
Love the Plants
Love everything
If you love everything
You will perceive
The divine mystery in things
And once you have perceived it
You will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly
More and more every day
And you will at last come to love the whole world
With an abiding universal love -Fyodor Dostoyevsky

After the poem is read invite the congregation to spend a moment in silence with their eyes open or closed, as they wish, to bring to mind the times and places that you have seen with new eyes, perceived God in a new way.

READING FROM 'A SONG OF FAITH' (suggest one or two readers)

We sing of God the Spirit, who from the beginning has swept over the face of creation,

animating all energy and matter and moving in the human heart.

We sing of God the Spirit, faithful and untameable,
who is creatively and redemptively active in the world.

The Spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy,
not only in what is familiar, but also in that which seems foreign.
We sing of the Spirit, who speaks our prayers of deepest longing
and enfolds our concerns and confessions, transforming us and the world.

HYMN

I See A New Heaven VU 713

Open My Eyes VU 371

LIVING FOR THE EARTH

MEDITATION

One of the ways we see the earth is as 'mother.' But I wonder how deeply we've really entered into this image of earth as mother. One of the United Church internet resources available around the 'Living for the Earth' mission theme entitled "Why Do We Call the Earth our Mother" encourage us to develop this image further. To see mother earth as one who nurtures our well being, and is deserving of our love, respect and care. One who does not forget us and one who cannot be forgotten.

This reminded me of the story ' Love You Forever' by Robert Munsch. Most of us know it and few of us begin it without the tissues handy. In it the mother nurtures her son through every stage of his life, holding him close and rocking him every chance she gets. As she ages and weakens, no longer able to sing "I'll

love you forever.” The son in turn, picks her up in his arms and rocks her back and forth, back and forth singing, ‘I’ll love you forever, I’ll like you for always, as long as I’m living my mommy you’ll be.

Our Mother Earth needs our rocking, our care, our songthe song is deep within each one of us. It is the Lord’s song and like the hymn says ‘so let us all sing with one heart and one voice the Song of the Singer in whom we rejoice.’ Let us all join together, one heart, one voice as we read from our ‘Song of Faith’.

READING FROM ‘A SONG OF FAITH’ (unison)

We sing of God’s good news lived out, a church with purpose:

We sing of God’s mission.

In grateful response to God’s abundant love,

we bear in mind our integral connection

to the earth and one another;

we participate in God’s work of healing and mending creation.

OPTIONAL SELECTION:

Select a Minute for Mission that highlights a story about greening the earth or perhaps summarize a story from the special edition Mandates, ‘Challenging Empire: Call to Community’ or “Living for the Earth: Choosing Creation Over Empire’.

Minute for Missions can be found at www.united-church.ca . The 2009 issue has the ‘green theme’ on April 19, October 11 and in the 2010 issue, February 28, April 18.

OFFERING INVITATION

We have accepted God’s abundant gifts to us, both tangible and intangible—and we have been called to share our abundance with others. May we give as God has given to us, with great love.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

God of all gifts, we pray that in some small way, we reflect the overflowing generosity we have received in our lives through the gifts we present today. Let us proclaim the Good News through our gifts and through our actions. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND CONCERN (pg. 614/615 from Celebrate God’s Presence)

Creating God, we celebrate the life-giving bonds we have with all you have created. We give you thanks for the care that we can give and receive as your creatures. We thank you for the land upon which we dwell, land that nourishes body, mind and soul. God of creation,

As the land cares for us, may we care for the land.

We thank you for water, which fills the swamp, and flows in river and brook. God of creation,

As the water cares for us, may we care for the water.

We thank you for the air, which gives life to us and to all that moves. God of creation,

As the air cares for us, may we care for the air.

We thank you for seeds and crops, plants and trees. God of creation,

As earth’s vegetation cares for us, may we care for earth’s vegetation.

We thank you for birds and animals. God of creation,

As earth’s creatures care for us, may we care for earth’s creatures. Amen

HYMN

We Shall Go Out With Hope VU 586

You Shall Go Out With Joy VU 884

Let All Things Now Living VU 242

Go Make a Difference MV

BLESSING

May the blessing of God,

who causes the land to put forth plants and trees;

and of Christ,

who calls all creation to new life;

and of the Holy Spirit,

whose breath animates the earth and all its inhabitants, be with you
all. Amen.