

Heritage Sunday, October 31, 2010

Introduction:

These worship resources are designed to assist you in planning for worship on Heritage Sunday. This special Sunday focuses on the spiritual heritage of the church and helps us remember the testimony of those who are now “saints above.” In the process, we can emphasize the relevance of the Anabaptist roots of the Mennonite Church for the life of the church today. Their example can inspire us to live faithfully out of that tradition and leave a legacy of faithfulness for future generations.

The early Anabaptists lived with the constant threat to their safety and learned to trust God’s wisdom, providence and care in the midst of the persecutions they endured. After the Russian Revolution, almost 100 years ago, the Mennonites in Russia were confronted with widespread injustice and senseless violence throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The diaries and letters of those who survived those tumultuous years describe the helpless cries for justice, as they endured the forced collectivization, starvation, and banishment to Siberia. At the same time, there was an amazing display of faith in God’s providential care – a faith that carried people through the endless days and months and even years of hardship and persecution. That same faith was at work in Canada as well in the conscientious objectors during World Wars 1 and 2. Their stories reveal faith and courage in the face of challenge and hardship that resulted from taking an unpopular stance during a time of war. Similarly, God’s people in the Old Testament faced widespread injustice and impending occupation by foreign powers and had to wrestle with God’s call to live by faith and wait for vindication by God, at God’s time.

From all these witnesses we can learn that, in the midst of chaos, faith in God’s righteousness and timing can thrive. Many Mennonites who have lived in Canada all of their lives, do not know what it is like to live out faith in the midst of over-encompassing injustice. Most of us do not know what it is like to wonder aloud why God tolerates the evil and violence around us. May the stories in this worship resource help us appreciate our heritage and help us stand in solidarity with God’s children who suffer injustice today.

Theme: God calls us, as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live by faith, to delight in God’s commands, and serve

as instruments of grace and transformation in the face of injustice.

Suggested Bible Texts: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm 119:137-144; II Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; and Luke 19:1-10.

Suggested Hymns:

HWB 328 O God, our help in ages past
HWB 327 Great is thy faithfulness
HWB 370 O day of God, draw nigh
STJ 65 Let justice flow like streams
Faithful One by Brian Doerksen

Call to Worship: (congregational responses appear in bold print)

You are righteous, O Lord,
And your judgments are right.

**You have appointed your decrees in righteousness
And in all faithfulness.**

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness
And your law is truth.

**Your decrees are righteous forever;
Give us understanding that we may live.**

Prayers of Confession:

God of the future, you grant visions and dreams
to those who look to your Spirit for guidance,
who incline their ears to hear your Word anew.
You sustain with your power all who purpose to follow you.
Grateful for our strong and wide heritage,
staked out by men and women of courage and faith,
we have been afraid to step out like they did,
when your Spirit urges your people further forward.

Forgive our fear of where you may lead,
and of what you may require of us.
Open our hearts and eyes to a fresh vision of Jesus,
who ever leads us forward into your coming kingdom.

Confession of Sin:

HWB 701

Offering:

HWB 750

Children's Time:

For Children's resources see:

Hide and See - www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1374

Love your Enemies - www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1375

Key Bible Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Sermon Prompts:

Outline:

1. Injustice and pain is a part of life; there will be times when we cry out to God for deliverance. (See Habakkuk 1:1-4, II Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12, and stories below.)
2. In the midst of injustice, God call's us to live lives of faith. (Habakkuk 2:4, Psalm 119:143, and the stories below.)
3. God will hear our cries for deliverance. (God will be faithful: a) in his own time: Habakkuk 2:3, and b) in his own way: Luke 19:1-10.)
4. We are called to be messengers of God's grace and transformation in the face of injustice.

Notes:

The prophet **Habakkuk** wrote his book during the 7th century BCE, just before the siege of Babylon and the capture of Jerusalem. Doubt and fear gripped Judah, and many wondered where God was in the midst of the turmoil that swirled around them. The country was plagued by injustice and, seemingly, God was not willing to intervene and punish the evil doers.

The Mennonites who lived in Russia during the 1917 revolution and resulting civil war voiced many of the same sentiments as they faced anarchy and injustice. Entries from diaries and letters written during these days are often painful to read, and seem to echo the words of Habakkuk. Here are sample entries from the diary of **Katherina Janzen Enns**:

March 31, 1920: "I am so upset I can hardly write. Oh, how much suffering is there in the world?"

April 1, 1920: "Oh if only a peaceful time would come, if the Lord would provide it."

April 12, 1920: "If only we could have a stable government again – so that we could keep what we have and they wouldn't take away even our cows from us. May God make it so that they withdraw – these communists."

May 20, 1920: "Many tears were shed . . . So many have

been killed. It is so sad, all the things they have destroyed. They burned such nice homes. There are so many who must borrow clothes just to go to church."

June 16, 1920: "We work and work, only to have it taken away. But the Lord will not put a greater burden on us than we deserve."

June 28, 1920: "Oh we long so much for a different time, but when will that ever happen?"

July 26, 1920: "When will we ever have a Sunday where we can go to a gathering? It seems everything is dead. I am getting really frightened about it. It can't stay this way. The dead must arise. Yet we all sleep as though we were dead."

May 26, 1920: "These are very unsettled times we live in. We are never certain if they will take everything away. But today I read a very profound chapter where Jesus himself says, 'Not one hair shall fall from your head without his will.' With this we can be completely comforted."

Today, some Mennonites whose parents and grandparents experienced injustice and persecution in the former Soviet Union have returned to Ukraine and Russia to restore some of the church buildings and other institutional structures that once served as places of ministry. The Mennonite Centre in Molochansk, Ukraine is an example of how Russian Mennonites are now seeking to minister to the people of Ukraine. While it is tempting to forget the pain and sadness that the former Soviet Union held for many of them, these people have responded to a call that God has placed on their lives. They have chosen to bring a message of hope and reconciliation to an area where people of their faith once experienced injustice and sorrow.

Sam Martin applied, but was denied Conscientious Objector status in Brooks, Alberta, on April 19, 1944. He was sentenced to thirty days in the provincial jail, and was then handed over to the military. When he was issued a uniform, he refused to wear it, and was sentenced to a military prison. Treatment was sadistic. Here are a few excerpts from his story.

"When Sam arrived, in handcuffs, on May 25, the Regimental Sergeant Major showered him with bitter invectives, snarling, "You will wear a uniform! I am in charge here, and there has never been a person under my control whom I haven't been able to break! Take off your civilian clothes and put on an army uniform or go naked!"

"Sir," Sam quietly replied, "I refuse to serve in the army. I am a conscientious objector, and I will not wear the uniform."... Sam's civilian clothes were taken away...When the guards

noticed that he still would not put on the uniform, they turned off the heat in his cell...In addition he was placed in solitary confinement...Gradually Sam became despondent. He imagined that everyone had forgotten him, that no one cared....In reality, Sam's family and church...prayed for him constantly. ...

In mid April, 1946, ...he was formally discharged,...[with] the note "Twenty-three months non-effective service."

In reflecting on his stand forty-five years later, Mr. Martin says,Through this experience I received an understanding of what it means to be the church that has never left me. It is much more than an association of people. It is a body and when one member suffers, the whole body suffers....I am also indebted to some government officials such as the prison warden at Lethbridge." From *Sam Martin Went to Prison*, by William Janzen & Frances Greaser, © 1990 Mennonite Central Committee, (13-33).

Sending:

Eternal God,
as we leave this place of worship,
help us to live lives of faith
in the midst of injustice and pain.

Grant us the patience to wait upon you,
knowing that at the appointed time
and in your own way
you will reconcile all things to you, through Jesus Christ,
our Lord. AMEN

Resources:

Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching & The Arts. Year C: Lectionary Aids for 2003-2004. Volume 37.1 (2003-2004).

Enns, Katherina Janzen. *Tagebuch: A Diary of Katherina Janzen Enns (1876-1934) kept between February 14th, 1920 and April 10th, 1924.* Rosetta Projects, 2008.

Janzen, William & Greaser, Frances: *Sam Martin Went to Prison: the story of Conscientious Objection and Canadian Military Service*, © 1990 Mennonite Central Committee, assigned to Kindred Press, (13-33).

Soards, Marion, Thomas Dozeman, and Kendall McCabe. *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year C, After Pentecost 2.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

This particular worship resource was prepared for Mennonite Church Canada by Richard Thiessen, Library Director, Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, BC, and edited by Elsie Rempel, Director of Christian Nurture.

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