

Assembly Sunday, 2011

It's Epic: Remembering God's Future (Revelation 21: 1-4, 22-26 and 2:1-5).

The worship planning team for this Assembly Sunday resource and the various worship services at Assembly 2011 includes Kevin Derksen, pastor of St. Jacobs Mennonite Church; Carol Penner, pastor of The First Mennonite Church, Vineland; Paul Dueck, pastor at Windsor Mennonite Fellowship; Carlos Correa, member of Windsor Mennonite Fellowship; and Karen Martens Zimmerly, Denominational Minister for Mennonite Church Canada. The children's feature has been developed by Elsie Rempel, Director of Christian Nurture for Mennonite Church Canada.

Introduction:

From July 4-8, 2011, individuals from Mennonite Church Canada congregations will gather to worship and work together. The children's and junior youth assembly, the youth assembly and the delegate assembly will all focus on the theme for this year, "It's Epic: remembering God's future," inspired by texts from the last two chapters of Revelation.

In the beginning, God was at home with mortals, provided for their need (Genesis 1:28-30) and walked with them in the garden. And then Jesus came as God with us so that we could not only remember this beginning but also count on it as our future. In our present, we are blessed by the Holy Spirit as God in and among us. As we look ahead to our future, we continue discerning what it means to be God's faithful, witnessing church in a world full of challenge and change. To help us we have the trustworthy and true promise in Revelation 21 and 22 that God will be worshipped on a throne in the middle of the city of heaven on earth. God will again make his home among mortals. God was and is among us, with us and in us. May these texts help us live more fully into God's vision for being the church in the world so that allegiance to Jesus Christ and his church is experienced as living in a city where the creativity, culture and diversity of all are able to flourish in the gracious light of God.

WE GATHER

Gathering Hymns

HWB 14 – *Come we that love the Lord*
HWB 16 – *God is here among us*
HWB 19 – *Open now the gates of beauty*
STJ 4 – *You've got a place*
STS 28 – *Holy Child within the manger*

Call to Worship

People: We are the church that lives into God's future today.

Leader: A church united across space and time.

People: A church of many races, languages and ethnicities.

Leader: A church that lives by the work of God in Christ that was, is now, and is still to come.

People: The one who is seated on the throne says to us: "See, I am making all things new!"

Leader: A new heaven and a new earth, where the home of God is among God's people.

People: God's future is epic, and it's good news.

All: Remember God's future, for this is our story!

Song of Praise Possibilities

HWB 70 – *Immortal, invisible, God only wise*
HWB 116 – *Crown him with many crowns*
HWB 124 – *O worship the Lord*
HWB 296 – *Here from all nations*
HWB 299 – *New earth, heavens new*
HWB 400 – *Santo, santo, santo*
STS 34 – *You are holy*
STS 92 – *Sing with all the saints in glory*
STS 93 – *Alleluia, give glory*
STS 109 – *Blessing and honor*

Prayer

Some congregations have a regular prayer of confession while others incorporate it into their congregational prayer. Two options are provided below.

Prayer of Confession

God of all Life, there is no God like you in all the earth.

You walked with humanity at the beginning and shared your dream with us.

You called a people through whom all nations would be blessed.

You sent us prophets to remind us and call us back to your dream.

You came down from heaven in Jesus, opening eyes and hearts to the kingdom of God among us.

You gave us your Word to help us hear and remember you.

You came to us, and come to us still, as Holy Spirit, in visions and dreams, opening eyes and hearts to signs of the Kingdom among us, helping us believe your dream and promises are trustworthy and true.

We confess that we are often preoccupied with the challenging distractions of the world we live in.

We confess that we often focus on building our own little kingdoms, kingdoms where we are in control.

We confess that we forget your kingdom is at hand and breaking in among us, and that God will be indeed be worshipped and obeyed on earth as in heaven.

Forgive us and help us remember your future. Equip us to participate in your in-breaking reign with courage and joy.

Words of Assurance:

God remembers, is patient and quick to forgive, and wants our participation in God's future.

Thanks be to God.

Congregational prayer

Lord, we are your people gathered for prayer and praise.

We are your sons and daughters, people of differing ages and abilities,

people of varied cultures and languages,

all gifted, all precious to you.

Together, with one voice, we pray to you who makes us one.

We remember your faithfulness, your deliverance, our salvation in Jesus Christ.

You are Immanuel, God with us, who made your home with us.

We remember the gift of the Spirit, uniting us, energizing us, filling us with love.

We also remember and confess that all is not peaceful here on planet earth.

Your kingdom is not yet come, is missing in action wherever the hungry are not fed, whenever the children suffer violence.

Wars rage and the land cries out as we offer you our silent petitions.

(period of silence)

We hear your voice calling us to a future where you will make your home among us; where your presence will fill the Holy City and your kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

God of heaven and earth, you are truly Immanuel, God with us.

We are your people, gathered for prayer and praise.

We are your sons and daughters.

Help us remember your future.

Amen.

Hymn of Confession Possibilities

HWB 145 – *There's a wideness in God's mercy*

HWB 366 – *God of grace and God of glory*

HWB 367 – *For the healing of the nations*

HWB 405 – *Where cross the crowded ways*

STJ 67 – *Let there be light, Lord God*

STS 33 – *Let justice roll like a river*

STS 69 – *Ya hamalaLab (O Lamb of God)*

Song of Assurance Possibilities

HWB 226 – *You are salt for the earth*

HWB 323 – *Beyond a dying sun*

HWB 332 – *Blessed assurance*

HWB 611 – *Soon and very soon*

STS 72 – *We are often tossed and driv'n*

STJ 97 – *The Lord is my light*

STS 124 – *My soul cries out*

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

Scripture: Revelation 21: 1-4; 22-26 and 22:1-5

Children's time

Welcome to this time of thinking about God's messages in the Bible. Let's get quiet and think about God being with us.

Today, I'd like to think about the Bible being a bit like an Alphabet book. Have you read some good alphabet books? What's the first page in those books about?...Yes, things that start with A. If we think of the Bible like an Alphabet book the first page is about how God made the world and everything in it and went for walks in his garden with Adam and Eve.

And what is the last page in Alphabet books about? ... Yes, things that start with Z. Now, if we were speaking and reading Greek, like the writer of this part of the Bible did, our Alphabet books would start with a page about Alpha instead of A and end with a page about Omega, instead of Z.

If the Bible was an alphabet book, today's reading would come from the Z page, or the Omega page, because it's at the end. See where it is in my Bible? And on this page, it tells about the writer hearing a voice from heaven say, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." Isn't that neat?

Do you wonder what else is on this Z or the Omega page of the Bible? I do. Let's see... Oh, it says some wonderful things. It says that God's home is among the people, that God lives with us and will be with us at the end. It says that someday the city of God will come down to earth, and earth will become like heaven. In that heavenly city God will wipe every tear from our eyes; sadness and crying and pain will be gone, and God will make all things new! Isn't that wonderful? Let's thank God for that wonderful promise.

Prayer: Thank you God, for making this world and walking in the garden with the first people. Thank you for promising to bring heaven back to earth and to make everything new. We are so glad you will wipe away all our tears and get rid of the things that hurt us. We worship you. Amen.

Sermon starter: The book of Revelation was written to early Christians who were faced with the pressure of accommodating to the power and wealth of Rome, as well as calling the emperor their Lord and God.

1. Rev. 21: 1-4: John's vision of a new heaven and a new earth is one in which the earth is transformed rather than destroyed; the forces of chaos and evil (the sea) are gone and a city, the new Jerusalem is at the centre of this renewed earth. As you think about loyalty to Christ in your context, what are the pressures and questions that pull at your community? Where is "the sea" of chaos and evil experienced in your context? What foretastes of this new creation are already being experienced? What challenges are there to seeing a city at the centre of God's salvation of the earth?

2. Rev. 21: 22-26: Temples and gates were significant boundary markers in ancient cities. In God's new Jerusalem there will be no need of either since God's presence will be experienced in the whole city. How is God's active presence already observable in your community or around the world? Name and celebrate the ways and places where your

congregation is joining God's activity. And what about the closed doors and gates – is there need to lament some of those?

In the new Jerusalem the diversity and gifts of all nations are welcome because they have experienced God's transformation. This will be a transformed and multi-cultural city. What aspects of your "nation" (*ethnos* or peoples) needs transformation? How is your church a foretaste of the new Jerusalem? What other "nations" or peoples do you relate to in your community and/or area church? How are you building relationships with these peoples to experience God's vision of an un-gated community in which the glory and honour of all nations contribute to its welfare?

3. Rev. 22: 1-5: The tree of life (Gen 1-2) has become accessible. Together with the healing river it serves the healing and blessing of the nations (peoples). God's city and world will be a place of beauty, of hope, of light and of healing. How is your congregation joining this vision?

Testimony is an important part of the worship service of some of Mennonite Church Canada's multi-cultural congregations. Rather than a sermon, consider asking a number of individuals to respond to how they are experiencing God's vision in one of the aspects listed above.

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

Offering Hymn Possibilities

HWB 511 – *God, who touches earth*

STJ 60 – *Lord of all good*

STS 43 – *Le' ou pote yon kado (Remember this)*

Song of Sending Possibilities

HWB 306 – *In Christ there is no East or West*

HWB 322 – *For we are strangers no more*

HWB 420 – *Heart with loving heart united*

HWB 427 – *You shall go out with joy*

STJ 73 – *The Lord lift you up*

STJ 78 – *We will walk with God*

Sending

God invites us into his future, where the one who makes all things new has made his home among us. We are called and chosen, together embraced by the God in whom tears, mourning, crying, pain and even death will be no more. Remember God's future, for this is our story. Our Lord says, "See, I am coming soon!" and we respond, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.