

## World Communion Sunday, October 2, 2011

HWB - *Hymnal Worship Book*, SJ - *Sing the Journey*, SS - *Sing the Story*\*

### Introduction:

World Communion Sunday provides an opportunity for congregations to look beyond local and denominational boundaries and focus on our hope for unity in Christ with all other Christians. This is a BIG morning. World Communion Sunday calls us to claim and proclaim our God-given unity in Christ, who is the host at ALL our communion tables. It is a day to celebrate the greatness of our God, the largeness of the body of Christ, and the enormous gift that God gave us when he sent Jesus to earth. As we stand in awe of the great mystery that the God of all creation wants to be in relationship with humankind, we respond with delight and obedience.

**Visual Ideas:** To symbolize the diversity and celebrate unity in Christ and the vastness of God, display globes or maps of the world, along with flags and souvenirs from as many countries of the world as you can. Drape or hang long strips of fabric, in many different colours at the front or around the sanctuary.

**Scripture texts:** Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12-20, Psalm 19, Philippians 3: 4b-14, Matthew 21: 33-46

### CALL TO WORSHIP AND PRAISE

Psalm 19 reminds us that we have come to worship an amazing, awesome, and mysterious God. The impact of reading this Psalm could be increased by displaying pictures of the sky while it is being read and as you sing. The opening songs and the prayers have been chosen to highlight the awesomeness of our creator God, so begin this worship service by lingering in awe and wonder of the Majestic One.

**Call to worship:** (Psalm 19: 1-10, 14) Read this psalm as an antiphonal reader's theatre, changing parts whenever a sentence ends or there is a natural breath pause. It could be read by one child and one adult reader. Both should be well prepared and aware that they are giving voice to God's Word. It is powerful to hear these enormous declarations from an intergenerational pair.

### Prayer of Invocation:

Almighty, Eternal, Everlasting God – we are gathered here today from many different places. We now join our hearts and minds with millions of others around the world who have also gathered to worship you.

Together we marvel at the beauty of creation, the colours, the smells, the sounds, and the sights that keep unfolding all around us.

We marvel at the great mystery that the Almighty of all creation touches the hearts and lives of humanity. We welcome your touch on our lives this day.

We stand in awe of you, our God, and give up our need to figure it all out. This day, may our worship be simple and pure, honest and free. We worship you, our God, because we can, and because we must, for you are great. We need you and we love you.

In the name of Jesus, your Son, we pray. Amen.

### Songs of Praise and Adoration:

In keeping with the focus of this service, choose instruments and songs that make a large sound. Invite musicians from all age groups, as many cultural back grounds as you can, and from both genders to participate. Visual diversity says more than words can muster.

HWB 50 *Praise the Lord, sing hallelujah*  
HWB 62 *Who is so great a God*  
HWB 70 *Immortal, invisible, God only wise*  
HWB 76 *Je louerai l'Éternel (Praise, I will praise you, Lord)*  
HWB 78 *Ehane he'ama (Father God, you are holy)*  
HWB 112 *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic*  
The Mennonite Hymnal 535 *How Great Thou Art*  
SS 34 – *You are holy*

\*While the songs recommended in this resource are from Mennonite song books, we recognize there are many suitable songs available elsewhere. Feel free to supplement these suggestions with thematically suitable songs that are dear to you.

\* Song book abbreviations match those used for corresponding worship resources in *Leader Magazine*

## CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

### Confession

Use a written prayer of confession, such as SJ 132, and a well-known song of grace from the list below, to celebrate God's assurance of pardon.

HWB151 *Marvelous Grace of our loving Lord*

HWB 338 *I know not why God's wondrous*

HWB 344 *I will sing of my Redeemer*

HWB 345 *God sent his Son*

## HEARING GOD'S WORD

**Children's Story:** Tell stories and look at pictures of diverse people and places from other parts of the globe. Here are three options:

- Tell a story from Mennonite Church Canada Witness, such as "Under the Baobob Tree" [www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1577](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1577). You can find more celebration stories at [www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/154](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/154)
- Ask someone from a neighbouring congregation (different denomination from your own) to come and tell you a story about a mission project they are involved in somewhere in the world.
- Tell a story of what God is doing in the church with whom you partner.

Conclude this part of the service by talking together about things that are going on in your own church. Offer a prayer for the churches and people you have talked about.

### Sermon prompts:

All kinds of sermons beg to be preached from the richness of today's texts. Here are a few suggestions that can help you ponder what God is saying to you, your congregation, and our world on World Communion Sunday, 2011. It can be challenging to preach a sermon on days when there is so much to say. May you hear God's voice as you engage the discipline of narrowing your focus, choosing your theme, writing, and preaching.

1. **"God started it".** When we get into a fight with others, especially when we are young, one of the first things that often happens is that someone will point their finger at the other and say – "she started it." It's often hard to know who really did start the situation that evolved into a fight! In Exodus 20, fingers are clearly pointed at God, because in the relationship between God and God's people, "God started it," but it was a covenant, rather than a fight.

Covenant is a major biblical theme found in Exodus 20, a theme that finds its New Testament continuation in Matthew 26: 17-30, Mark 14: 12-25, Luke 22: 14-23. Your sermon could centre on the power and might of a God who initiated a covenant with the nation of Israel and extended it through Jesus with all of humanity. Waldemar Janzen, author and Professor Emeritus at Canadian Mennonite University, writes, "It is a chief mark of the covenant between God and Israel concluded at Sinai that the partners are unequal."<sup>1</sup> He points out that the Mount Sinai events emphasize the gracious commitment of God toward an undeserving people. This gracious faithfulness of God could be the point of this sermon, while also acknowledging the sinfulness of humanity. Include stories from around the world that emphasize God's faithfulness in big and small ways to help convey this theme.

2. **"What are we waiting for?"** As this is being written, many Manitobans are up to their armpits in flood water. The news of the flash forest fire at Slave Lake, Alberta, which burned down a third of the town, occupies the daily news. From farther afield, wars and rumours of wars keep popping up much like the spring wild fires in Canada's North. As I consider the Matthew text, I am reminded of the story of the man caught on the roof of his house as the flood waters rose around him. He prayed that God would rescue him. First a neighbour came by and encouraged him to climb down a rope ladder into a life raft, then a rescue boat came by and asked him to get in, and finally a search and rescue helicopter hovered overhead. The man refused to get in. When asked why he refused this help, he said, "I know God is coming. God will rescue me; so I'll just wait for God." Matthew 21 reminds us that God came and continues to come into the world, even though the world rarely recognizes or receives God. Like the prophets of old, this scripture invites the preacher to call the congregation to watchfulness and obedient response.
3. **"Give it up already!"** My husband and I recently moved to a new city, and so we have been having all kinds of opportunities to meet new people. I've noticed that almost the first question we ask of each other is "what do you do?" It's clear that credentials influence our opinion of the people we meet. In Philippians 3, Paul lists his credentials and then surrenders them, all for the sake of being like Christ. To "become like (Jesus) in his death", involves

<sup>1</sup> Waldemar Janzen, Exodus, Believers Church Bible Commentary, (C) 2000, Herald Press, Waterloo, ON, 249.

surrender. As we partake in the Lord's Supper along with millions of others around the globe, we commit ourselves to 'give it up already' – all for the sake of Jesus Christ, who lived, and died and rose again.

## COMMUNION SERVICE

**Bread Ideas:** If your congregation is willing to step away from its set routines for the preparation and distribution of bread and wine or juice, have children, adults, and youth bring baskets brimming full of all kinds of bread from every possible entrance to the front at this time. (The drink could already be on the table). This would symbolizing God's greatness, God's extravagant generosity, and that God's people come together from the east, west, south and north on this day around the Table of our Lord.

*Note: If you choose to involve children in the communion service, take care to include them in some way during the sharing of the communion elements. In some congregations, children are given a blessing while the adults are eating and drinking, some congregations offer a symbolic grape (immature wine) and cracker (unleavened bread), and some allow the children to participate fully. In any case, be sure to give the children and youth the message that they are a valued and integral part of the worldwide family of God. Remember to provide bread or crackers that are gluten and yeast free.*

**Communion Prayer:** SS 187, or this prayer from the bulletin series:

We give thanks for the gift of World Communion Sunday. Whatever the diversity is coming to the table, today we partake in a world-wide wave of kneelers, prayers, drinkers, and eaters who love, remember, and try to follow Jesus.

Thank you, Lord, for the people you invite to this table, brothers and sisters in Christ.  
We come to this table, knowing that God created us and loves us all.  
We come to this table, knowing that Jesus died for us all.  
We come to this table, knowing that God's Spirit sustains us all.  
We come to this table, to experience the mystery of our faith,  
Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

As we come to the table, grace us with your Holy Spirit so that we can understand the wideness of your love.  
We are one people, one body, your Church in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Words of Institution: Consider combining the Words of Institution found in 1 Cor. 11: 23-26, with the major theme from the sermon you preached. If you chose to use the Genesis theme of covenant and God's initiative, emphasize God as host as you invite people to the table, and we, as undeserving as we are, are welcomed. If you chose to centre your sermon on the Matthew text, emphasize that although the movement of God in our world is often surprising and at times difficult to discern, we need not fear, God will nourish and sustain us along the way. Finally, if you chose the Philippians text to speak on, the theme of surrender to the One who knows the Way, who leads us to new life and in new directions can be tied into the traditional Words of Institution.*

## Communion Songs:

SJ 86 Taste and see  
SJ 88 Halleluya! Pelo tsa rona (Hallelujah! We sing your praises!)  
SS 77 Here is the bread  
HWB 145 There's a wideness in God's mercy  
HWB 471 Eat this bread  
HWB 472 I am the Bread of life

## SENDING

**Blessing:** SS 188, or

"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [we] press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:13b-14) May we go in peace, filled with the light of your Spirit, ready to join God's redeeming activity in our world. Amen.

Sending Song – HWB 118 Praise God from whom

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This worship resource, edited by Elsie Rempel, was written for Mennonite Church Canada by Karen Schellenberg, former pastor of Portage Mennonite Church, Portage la Prairie, MB, currently pursuing further pastoral studies.

*Direct your comments about Special Sunday Worship Resources to Elsie Rempel at [erempel@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:erempel@mennonitechurch.ca).*