

Mission Sunday, November 13, 2011

Introduction

These worship resources are designed to assist you in planning for worship on Mission Sunday. The focus of Mission Sunday is on the mission of God in the world, through the church, a mission to which all are called, all are equipped, and all are sent.

This particular worship resource has been prepared on behalf of Mennonite Church Canada by a Mennonite Church Canada Witness Worker in Galilee. In the scripture texts we hear of the goodness of God's ways – ways that transform us and sustain us by building a deep Christ-centered peace, even among people the world expects to be enemies. This view results from the enduring lessons our worker has learned from Arab Christian friends in Galilee. May their witness inspire us to be more deeply rooted in Christ's peace as we engage the world with the reconciling gospel of Jesus Christ.

Theme – *The Ways of the Lord are Good*

*The resources *Sing the Journey* and *Hymnal: A Worship Book* are referred to as SJ and HWB

Worship Outline

WE GATHER

Invocation

We lift our eyes to you O God, enthroned in heaven.

We look to you, Lord our God, for your mercy, just as the poor keep their eyes on the wealthy.

As the ones who are oppressed follow the moves of the powerful, we keep looking to you.

We look to you alone, O God, our only Way.
(Adapted from Psalm 123)

Words of Welcome: *Welcome participants to this worship service in which we are focusing on the missional nature of the church. Add your own content and summarize the introduction as appropriate to your context.*

Call to Worship: With the songwriter, I invite you to join me as I proclaim, "In Christ alone my hope is found, he is my light, my strength, my song; this Cornerstone, this solid Ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm. What height of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!"

CCLI Song # 3350395, © 2001 Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) Lyrics, chords, and more for this modern hymn are available at www.fundamentallyreformed.com/2005/12/12/in-christ-alone.

Litany of Response: *(Based on Isaiah 45: 15-21)*

L: We look to you alone, O God.

P: *You are the One who gives us love, who gives us peace, who gives us the life of shalom that is yours alone.*

L: We know that the ways of love, peace, and the journey to you are not in our control, for you are the One who has all things in your hands.

P: *We come to you now confessing this together in your presence.*

L: Redemptive power is yours alone. All other power is void to heal the great needs of this world.

All: *We worship you in our hearts knowing that only you truly meet those needs.*

Song of Praise: SJ 16 *Praise with joy the world's Creator, In Christ Alone* (see the link above for this song), or HWB 42 *All people that on earth do dwell*

Confessing:

Have mercy on us Lord, have mercy, for we have tried to live in our own ways and on our own steam. We've had our fill of this and have run out of steam. The disenfranchised of our world have had more than their fill of the ways of those who are powerful and cling to control. Forgive us, Lord. Help us to root ourselves and our peace work in your love, and to share a deeper peace with the disenfranchised. *Invite the congregation to join you as you conclude with the words of the prayer in SJ 130.*

Song: HWB 137 *Forgive our sins as we forgive*, or SJ 47 *Oh, Lord have mercy*

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD:

Prayer: *(to introduce the hearing of God's Word)*

God says, "I am the Lord, there is no other God."

Lord, show us the way to your peace, your love and your justice.

The way of shalom lies in you alone.

You give us life and reveal your character as one who loves,
who gives us the way and who speaks in ways we understand.

We hope in you alone. **Amen.**

Scripture reading: Isaiah 45:15-21, Psalm 123, John 14: 5-7

Children's Story:

"What do you want to do today?" Hannah asked her twin brother Daniel. "I don't know," said Daniel, "what do you want to do?" They asked each other this question a lot. This conversation could have gone on for a long time, like it usually did, but then they saw Joseph, their local pastor, riding towards them on his donkey. "Hannah, Daniel, come, follow me," Joseph called out to them. "Where?" said Hannah. Joseph was close now. "Down to the sea of Galilee," he said. Daniel answered, "I'm not allowed down to the sea by myself, it's too dangerous to go alone, but I know it's full of good fish to eat." "I always wanted to go fishing there, but I'm scared," added Hannah. "Yeah, getting there is rough," said Joseph, "but I know you can both do it if you follow me. I'll talk to your parents so they'll know you're with me." Then Joseph rode past them, told their parents, and led them on their adventurous journey.

Hannah looked at Daniel for a moment, then climbed onto her own donkey and started riding after Joseph. She rode fast and finally caught up, but she was scared. Joseph was pleased that his young friends were in on this trip. "Don't be scared, just follow me." Soon Joseph could hear Hannah trotting over the gravel behind him. She worked hard to stay close to Daniel and Joseph. She was starting to get tired and they were now riding up a big hill. Hannah kicked her donkey to go faster, trying to keep Joseph in sight.

Hannah fell back a bit, but she kept her eyes on Daniel who was keeping to Joseph's path. The path was now dirt, with lots of stones and tree roots; it went up and down a lot. For a while Hannah couldn't see Daniel and Joseph, but when she saw the sea through the trees, she relaxed. As soon as she turned the corner, she saw Daniel and Joseph again. They were standing at the entrance to the place where they would

be fishing, smiling and waiting for her. Hannah kept her eyes on the path, dodged the tree roots and rode up to Joseph, who gave her a big hug. He told her how proud he was of her for keeping up and following him the whole way. Then he gave her a long drink from his water pouch. They were all tired, but happy about enjoying this trip together. As soon as they finished giving their donkeys some water, they rushed down to play and fish in the sea.

When they rode back home, Hannah and Daniel both stayed close to Joseph. Hannah told them she had been frightened to come because she thought it was dangerous. "Yeah, it was kind of dangerous," agreed Daniel, "but Joseph was there to show us the way."

Wondering Questions:

I wonder why they thought the ride to the Sea of Galilee was dangerous.

I wonder how following Jesus is like following Joseph on this donkey ride.

I wonder what trip Jesus wants us to follow him on.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for trips. Thank you for inviting us to follow you on good trips like Joseph did in our story. Help us enjoy the friendship of people who follow you. Amen.

Sermon Prompts

Idea #1: God as the One who meets needs. We often speak about God as our source of hope but the Arab Christians I relate to depend on God to meet their daily needs. This includes basic physical needs, but centers on needs of the heart that center them in God. Do we? Can we learn and grow in this deeper sense of God centered security? True peace and security come from God, rather from our accomplishments and possessions. How do we stay focused on God and God's way when surrounded by a world that caters to the powerful? Do we try to use God to accomplish social success or does God lead us toward ways that counter the world and its ideas of success?

Idea #2: True peace is found when we focus on God's way. Do we believe this? In the Middle East everyone has their own idea and methods for bringing peace. These ideas frequently conflict with each other and add to the region's turmoil. Where does peace come from? Does it come from those in power whom we lobby for justice? Does it come from the poor who are struggling to survive from one day to the next? From Arab Christians I learned that it comes from the God we claim came as the Prince of Peace. Knowing Christ as Prince of Peace; as the only way, is more than lip service,

and sustains Arab Christians as the source of a deep peace that radiates its invitation to others. Knowing Christ and his peace means that hearts and lives are transformed, even as the quest for justice continues. This deep, missional peace can also give us eyes to see others in new ways and to work for peace from within the heart of God. God's heart is a heart of love that sees beyond the walls and the blind hatred that limit us when we strive for peace and justice on our own steam.

Idea #3: The impact of our context on our views of peace.

Local and international, political, economic, and social situations inform our decisions and our views of peace. In Israel/ Palestine these views add to a complicated religious environment to produce an even more complicated view of what peace might be. Research into the many ideas of peace in this troubled region reveals that the majority of Christians understand Zionism as the way to peace. Why does Zionism hold such broad appeal? Why do so many adhere to this as the only "biblically sound" approach when the perspective of Christian Zionism challenges justice for Arab Christians, who live in constant oppression? They see it as a view that marginalizes them even further. On the other hand, can we promote an Anabaptist and Biblical ethic of justice without sacrificing the centrality of Christ? Does Mennonite peace and justice work today focus on the human rights centred justice at the expense of a Christ-centred justice? When Christians focus only on human rights and neglect the Christocentric aspect of justice, the quest for justice can easily create a seedbed for anger and hatred against the soldiers and settlers in the West Bank and Gaza, feeding a cycle of conflict. What is peace and justice for all if it does not include the oppressor and the oppressed? How do we keep from becoming biased in a situation fed by injustice on all sides? Arab Christians find sustaining strength by rooting themselves deeply in Christ's love for all.

Idea #4: What would Jesus do? How many times have you wondered what Jesus would have done in a certain situation? The slogan "What would Jesus do?" has become something of the recent past but is still applicable when we don't know how to react in a complex situation that overwhelms us or that threatens our lives. What would Jesus do in a situation like the one in Gaza? How would he react to being contained in a small space or faced with a soldier who is 18 years old, lost, overwhelmed himself and armed with the power of the oppressor? How would Jesus deal with the constant threat of bombings or missiles in Jewish communities next to Gaza? Or can we hand ourselves over to Him and depend on God to speak into situations like these to inform our actions? Some Palestinian Christians at checkpoints have survived the humiliation of interrogation by relying on God

for their responses. They experienced a love toward their oppressor that could only be credited to God. Have you ever experienced a situation that could not be explained by anything other than God's intervention? This possibility of God's direct involvement can change the way we use the phrase "what would Jesus do." With Jesus we acknowledge an authority that is higher than any soldier, commander, dictator, or government and can find the strength to speak, act and love in accordance with that.

WE RESPOND:

Offering prayer: SJ 148

Offering hymn: SJ 60 *Lord of all good* or HWB 385 *What gift can we bring*

Sharing: Invite people to share experiences from their lives in which depending on God has helped them speak reconciling words into difficult situations. This will work better if one or two people are asked to prepare for this.

Pastoral prayer: *Finish this prayer by joining with Christians around the world who pray the prayer Jesus taught us, the Our Father.*

Announcements:

WE ARE SENT

Sending Song: SJ 74 *Now go in peace* or HWB 421 *Bless'd be the tie that binds*

Sending prayer: God, we know you are the only one who is in control. We know you are the One who understands the hearts of all. We know you have all authority and that power belongs only to you. As we go from here, keep us in the place of recognizing your love, your peace, and your way, in a world in need of you. **Amen.**

Direct your comments about Special Sunday Worship resources to Elsie Rempel at erempel@mennonitechurch.ca.