

## Many People's Sunday, May 6, 2012

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

*This worship resource, which emphasizes the multicultural and multiracial nature of Mennonite Church Canada was written by Derek Cook and Rev. Doug Klassen of Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary, Alberta. Edited by Elsie Rempel, staff of Mennonite Church Canada.*

Download this resource at [www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1691](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1691).

### Introduction:

We live in a society where we interact with people of other cultures and other races on a daily basis. Whether it is through work, school, at the grocery store or at the neighbourhood playground, we see a wonderful display of colour, clothing and culture, yet most of our congregations are culturally and racially quite uniform.

This worship resource emphasizes the diverse nature of God's church and urges Mennonite Church Canada toward a better integration of God's people. We have 225 congregations and over 31,000 members worshipping God across Canada. However, most congregations are not integrated culturally and racially.

Our family histories remind us that suffering and hardship often accompany immigrants or refugees, and that newcomers want to pray to the Lord in the language of their hearts as they encounter the steep learning curve of acculturation. This has shaped our congregations, but also gives us compassion for today's newcomers to Canada. We believe it is the desire of the Holy Spirit to see the church as it was on the day of Pentecost, with many people, many languages, many cultures, altogether, made one in Christ.

To celebrate Many Peoples Sunday, we encourage churches to plan joint services with other ethnic churches or to exchange small groups of people for worship. The visitors could bring their gifts in the form of a song, a testimony, a story to share, etc. If language is a barrier, Power Point can assist in translation. A common meal after worship would further build connection and community.

### Theme: All the families of the nations shall worship before God

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Our theme comes from Psalm 22: 27. David's prophetic words call us to the living hope we have, that ALL the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord. All people, all colours, and all the families of the nations shall worship before God for dominion belongs to the Lord.

### Suggested Songs:

While we have wonderful resources in *Sing the Journey* (STJ), *Sing the Story* (STS) and *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (HWB), the repertoire of music in Mennonite Church Canada churches extends beyond these books. If your congregation will participate in small group exchanges, choose music that is familiar to both groups and can be sung in the languages of the people present. Our STJ and STS books have songs in different languages that may suit and many classic hymns and contemporary choruses have translations available.

STJ 11 *Praise, praise, praise the Lord!*

STJ 13 *My soul is filled with joy*

STJ 26 *God is our refuge and strength*

HWB573 *What a friend we have in Jesus*

HWB 143 *Amazing grace!* (Sing in own language)

HWB 575 *Precious Lord, take my hand*

HWB 601 *Take my hand and lead me, Father*

HWB 422 *May God grant you a blessing*

### GATHERING

#### Call to Worship

John 15:1-8 (Consider reading this responsively.)

#### Invocation

God of Life, prepare our hands for a touch,  
a new and different touch, a touch of encounter,  
a touch of awakening, a touch of hope, a touch of feeling.

Many are the worn-out gestures,  
many the movements frozen in time,  
many are the useless excuses just to repeat attitudes....

Give us daring; to create new titles of community, new links  
of affection, breaking away from old ways of relating,  
encouraging true, meaningful ways to move into closeness.

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

(by Ernesto Barros Cardoso, Brasil, *Gifts of Many Cultures*<sup>1</sup>, (Maren C. Tirabasi & Kathy Wonson Eddy, © 1995 Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio), p.4. \*The prayers in this wonderful book can be reprinted for congregational and educational non-profit use.

### CONFESSING/RECONCILING/WORDS OF ASSURANCE

O Lord, Our God, who fills your children with good things beyond measure and their deserving, give us grace at this time to remember the steadfastness of your love to us and to all people. Especially today, we come before you as members of your global church in its many nations.

We thank you for distinct history, for the vastness and variety of our heritages in art, culture, religion and philosophy. Help us to thankfully and mindfully learn of the riches of Christ from them and through them.

We thank you for your Church in our midst, and for the work of all your servants in planting it and nurturing it as your promise of life for all people.

We thank you for the growing sense of oneness among the Churches of Mennonite Church (Canada, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Eastern Canada – choose your preferred context) for their drawing together to confess and proclaim the Gospel of your Son, and to be fellow workers in the work of proclaiming release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to preach the good news to the poor.

Above all, we thank you for the gift of yourself in your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, and for your gift to us of faith in him...

Lord, you have given us so much. Give us one thing more: a grateful heart, for Jesus's sake.

(by Kate Compston, *Gifts of Many Cultures*, (Maren C. Tirabasi & Kathy Wonson Eddy, © 1995 Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio), p.14

### HEARING GOD'S WORD

#### Sermon and Children's Time:

*See reflections and suggestions below.*

#### Prayer of the People:

There is a fine prayer of thanksgiving and petition in *Gifts of*

*Many Cultures*, p 23. If you cannot access it, the broad, global focus of the prayer HWB 720 is also suitable for this Sunday.

**Benediction:** Sing HWB 422, *May God grant you a blessing.*

### Scripture thoughts and sermon seeds on Psalm 22: 25-31; 1 John 4:7-21:

The Psalm begins with strong lament. The psalmist was going through several trials as he wrote, and God seemed not to notice. It is the words from the first two verses of this Psalm that Christ cried out from the cross. Many commentators consider this Psalm a prophetic word about the coming Christ. Therefore, it makes sense that the heartache and anguish expressed here are also experienced by those who follow faithfully in the footsteps of Christ today. Lament is part of the Christian journey. This is particularly so for those who have had to leave home and family and become sojourners and strangers in a new land. How do we stand together and grow closer with those whose lives are full of lament? The words of 1 John come as words of assurance and words of challenge as we seek to fully integrate “many peoples” in the North American church, for “perfect love casts out all fear.” (1 John 4:18b)

We live with more than lament. As Christians who are living out our faith in religious and political communities of increasing diversity, we are also challenged to wrestle with questions that go to the core of who we are. The Many People's Sunday focus challenges us to reflect on questions such as the following:

- Do we maintain allegiance to a country? Is our notion of country tied to a cultural identity? Are we a “Christian country” or are we Christians living in a country? To whom does our first allegiance belong?
- Are Christians to be a people set apart? If so, what is that people like? Is our Christian (or Mennonite) identity tied to specific traditions or history?
- Are we in fact preparing for (or participating in) the kingdom of God? If so, how do we address the inherent and inherited power imbalances between us? How do we develop truly multi-cultural worship and community?
- God's kingdom of peace and justice transcends social and political divisions. What are we, as participants in it, called to do as witnesses to the broader community? Do we live and speak that truth? Do we share God's vision with society as it grapples with these challenges?

1 To borrow this book, visit [www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1692](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1692)

Culture is a beautiful thing. Through our individual cultures, histories, traditions, stories and practices we each express the beauty of God's creation. We each tell a strand of the grand history of God's will working itself out in our world. To fully appreciate God's creation and understand God's will, we each need to humbly share and listen to its expression in all the diverse voices that call to us as many peoples.

#### **Children's Time:**

Children love show and tell. If there are people present in the congregation who were not born in Canada (through exchange or as part of the church) have one or two of them bring a picture of them as a child in their home land. Invite them to share how they felt God's care and guidance as they came to a new country and invite them to teach the children a few words. For example, how do you say "Jesus" in Vietnamese? Or, they could teach them, and the whole congregation, the theme verse in their language. Projecting it in English phonetics on the screen would be most helpful. Challenge people to remember it and say it again at lunch time.

#### **Additional thoughts on the theme;**

Our world has shifted. As I (Derek) write this from my corner of it, just before Christmas, our Muslim mayor will soon light the Menora in front of a manger scene in City Hall. Over the last three decades a rapidly globalizing economy and amazing advances in tele-communications have brought the world and its many cultures together in ways never seen before. We come together as we hear and learn about new cultures and traditions, some that excite us, and some that challenge us. But we also come together as people in communities, as the communities we live in become ever more diverse.

We are fortunate to live in a society that has a history of accepting new peoples and cultures and has become stronger for it. Our history is one of successive waves of immigration from many parts of the world which has enriched the fabric of our communities. In truth we have always been a quilt with blocks of many different fabrics.

Yet, this diversity can also bring tensions as it calls us to continually challenge and redefine who we are. Especially now, as non-western traditions become increasingly rooted in our identity and seek an equal place in our culture. So, we have debates about "reasonable accommodation" of religious practices.

Meanwhile, attitudes towards "multi-culturalism" are shifting as more and more people are coming to hold the view that we need a "common culture" rather than one made up of many cultures. For many, that common culture is a western one rooted in shared western Christian values.

While this drama plays itself out in our communities, it equally challenges us as members of a global church. Mennonite history is at once intensely cultural even as it is global. The Mennonite history of persecution and migration has left the immigrant and refugee experience imprinted in our culture.

In North America, Mennonite "culture" has retained the flavour of the cultures from which our forebears fled in recent or distant memory. Yet the global Mennonite church transcends that history as Mennonite congregations in Latin America, Africa and Asia outnumber those in North America and Europe.

In our churches and our communities we are being challenged to redefine who we are. Are we a culture of many equal cultures? Or is there a dominant culture that merely tolerates others that are different?

I am reminded of this distinction each week as I do my grocery shopping. In one local store I frequent, there is one aisle in the store labeled and devoted to "ethnic food". This is a wonderful aisle full of spices, rice, curries and exotic sounding canned fruits from many parts of the world. Yet, every food in fact carries an ethnicity. Who decides what is "ethnic" and what is not, and what makes rice any more "ethnic" than sausage?

In the other store I frequent, there is no "ethnic" aisle. All the multiple types and flavours of food are all mixed up together on the shelves side by side. None is more "ethnic" than other, for we all bear an ethnicity of equal value.

So how do we come to understand the diversity inherent in the global church? Are we in fact all worshipping equally together side by side? Or are we stuck in our ethnic aisles? And who decides which worship practice or church belongs in which aisle? Do we occasionally wander down the ethnic aisle to sample the interesting items there and then return to the safety of what is familiar? Or do we open ourselves to the exciting possibility of living and worshipping equally with the humility of being just one of the many, many patterns that make up our diverse community and global church?

In truth, Christ called us to an allegiance that transcends narrow cultural or national allegiances. In challenging the exclusivity of the Jewish establishment, or the cultural biases that separated women or Samaritans, Christ called us to a higher allegiance, even as he paid respect to the earthly State. While we live out our lives in a world divided by cultures and borders, we simultaneously await and participate in the kingdom of God where such divisions are meaningless and we take our place simply as people individually created in the image of God.