

Many People's Sunday, May 5, 2013

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

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Introduction:

Did you know that congregations across Mennonite Church Canada worship in more than 15 languages? Many People's Sunday is an opportunity to thank God and celebrate this diversity of the crown of God's creation, the human race. The face of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA continues to change. In urban areas we see more people from different ethnic groups making those cities their homes. Some of them are, or choose to become, Mennonites. As a result, a multicultural Mennonite mosaic is growing and adding new colours, sounds and flavours to our church world. On this Sunday we have the opportunity to recreate a vivid picture of the image presented to us in the book of Revelation, where people from every nation, tribe, people and **language** stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were not just standing still before Christ; they were worshipping and praising Him.

Instead of letting diversity separate us, diversity can bring us together. Worship can be the channel for the Holy Spirit to affirm God's gift of unity to the church. The Holy Spirit also moves in our hearts as we consider that those who are different from us deeply desire to be embraced by us. Many People's Sunday can also help us embrace and include those who are different because of special needs, whether those needs be disabilities, homelessness, or poverty. Let us celebrate Many People's Sunday with an open mind, heart and spirit, so we glorify God and worship him in Spirit and in truth.

Theme: Worshipping beyond discrimination

Helpful Tips: Let worship committees and worship pastors or leaders implement some of the following ideas (depending on human and material resources):

- Invite a person of a different race, culture, ability or economic level to give a short testimony of how he or she has been welcomed and embraced in your church.

- Invite a singer, musician or worship band from a visible minority congregation to do a special musical number during the service.
- Create a PowerPoint presentation of the diversity you see in your neighbourhood or in the neighbourhood of your church building.
- Create a PowerPoint of the many peoples (different) in your congregation, or show this video from our national church www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1945.
- Invite someone who differs from your congregational norm to church on Many People's Sunday. Offer that person the needed support in order for him/her to attend and worship with you.
- Follow the worship service with an ethnic food festival. Ask people to bring food from different cultures.

Music:

Many People's Sunday should include songs that declare God's creation and could be sung in different languages. Suitable songs:

- HWB 55 *Cantemos al Señor (Let's sing unto the Lord)*
- HWB 7 *Here, O Lord, your servants gather*
- HWB 397 *God loves all his many people*
- HWB 306 *In Christ there is no East or West*
- HWB 322 *For we are strangers no more*
- HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*
- STJ 64 *Somos el cuerpo de Cristo (We are the body of Christ)*
- STJ 2 *Hamba nathi (Come, walk with us)*

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

Call to Worship:

(Gathering) Use the Call to Worship found in HWB 662, or use this antiphonal reading of Psalm 117:

Leader: All you peoples, praise the LORD.

People: All you peoples praise him,

Leader: because the LORD loves us very much,

People: and his truth is everlasting.

Invocation:

God our Creator, we worship and praise you for who you are.

We come to you with thanksgiving for the richness of your diversity.

God, you created us with diversity, and yet you created us with tender love.

As we celebrate our diversity, help us Lord, to understand your divine purpose in making us different.

Empower us to be instruments of unity and peace.

May your Holy Spirit guide us so we fully understand that your peace is a gift from you to the church and the world.

In the midst of diversity, help us remember that in Christ we are one.

Help us also remember that your glory fades away where there is favouritism and discrimination.

Help us remember that our identity is in Christ rather than in our differences.

Lord God, we are your people, your different and diverse people,

We ask your blessing upon our community, our church and our families.

In Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Children's Time

- Invite children to prepare a mosaic with different colours and shapes to represent the diversity around us. Then allow children to add more features to it during the children's time. Explain how the different colours represent different people, languages, ethnicity, social status, food, music, art, traditions, physical, and emotional conditions.
- Or, bring different kinds of treats and ask the kids: If they could be a treat, what kind of treat they would like to be? Why? After they respond, you can explain God's diversity in flavour, texture, colour and also where every fruit comes from. Point out that like human beings,

fruits also have physical defects, but that doesn't stop us or them from being good.

Sermon suggestions:

- **"Praise the Lord, all you people"** (Psalm 117:1, 2) The Psalmist invites us to worship God without discrimination. All the nations, all people are invited to recognize and affirm God's perfect love and endless faithfulness. It is not just an invitation to sing or pray, it is an invitation to extol him over anyone or anything. It invites us to celebrate the fact that now in "Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:13, 14). As we celebrate Many People's Sunday, keep in mind that we will one day stand in worship before God in all our diversity. We can start doing it here and now, because the Kingdom of God is already among us.
- **"No discrimination"** (James 2:1-5) James addresses the discrimination that was present in the different congregations where his letter was to be read. He tells them that favouritism does not please God. He tells them that wherever discrimination and favouritism is present God is not glorified; nor is God's glory in such a place. How do we treat those who are and look different than us? How do we react when a person with special needs sits beside us? How do we behave when a person with different political views from ours comes to worship in the same place we do? What if a person with different sexual orientation or practice wants to worship in our community of faith? How do we react when a Hispanic, Asian or Indian comes to my church? We should always keep in mind the rich and varied image of worship in Revelation 7: 9, 10.
- **What Colour is God's Skin?** (Revelation 7: 9-12) I remember that, long ago, in my elementary school the school principal asked the music teacher to teach us a song called "What colour is God's skin?" At the time, we found the song to be a boring experience. As we moved from one grade to the next one, year after year, we continued to sing the same song. One day, the principal explained that the reason he asked the music teacher to teach the song and sing it every year was to make us aware of the diversity around us. He wanted us to embrace others, he wanted us to remove ethnic barriers and to accept each other as God does. I learned to appreciate the lyrics. Here they are:

God's Skin (translated)

Good night I said to my little one,
when exhausted he went to bed,
Then, he lifted his eyes and asked with tenderness
Dad! What colour is God's skin?
What colour is God's skin?
What colour is it?
I said: Yellow, Red, Black, Brown and White,
We are all the same in God's eyes.

With sadness in his eyes he looked at me,
And then he asked:
Why is there so much racial and ethnic hate
Why is there discrimination if, like you said, we are all the
same in God's eyes?

Son, that is part of humanity's sad past,
But soon it will come to an end.
We are learning today for the coming future
When we will live as children of God.
Jesus has given us the opportunity
To create a fraternal world
Where the different ethnic groups and races
Work united for a better world.

Division, racial and ethnic conflict is not new to the church.
Believers of the first century struggled with the same
issues, and for that reason Paul wrote letters to them. They
had a more difficult time than we do in overcoming their
differences. Here we are, worshipping together, sometimes
eating together, doing ministry and playing together. There
is still a lot to be done for us to resemble the multitude in
John's Revelation, in chapter 7, verse 9, but I am optimistic
and encouraged about what the church of Jesus Christ has
been able to achieve in the last few years. Those first century
believers had deprecating names to call each other, to refer
to circumcised men as purer and better and to refer to
uncircumcised men as impure, and of a lesser category. They
fiercely fought each other, did not relate with each other, and
considered each other enemies. They judged each other for
what they ate or didn't eat, and over their background.

Praises be to the Lamb, yes, Hallelujah to the one who has
destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall, our Lord Jesus
Christ, who has overcome this enmity.

Living Together with Each Other:

(Luke 6:26-33) Now that we are in Christ, we are God's
people. The Bible also says that we belong to the family of
God. If we are God's family, God's people, we must learn how
to live together with each other. We better start practising
here because we will spend eternity together in God's

presence. How can we do that? Here are some biblical tips:

1. Loving each other (John 13:34).
2. Encouraging each other (1 Thess. 5:11)
3. Bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4: 2, 3)
4. Forgiving each other (Eph. 4:32)
5. Not provoking and envying each other (Gal. 5:26)
6. Admonishing each other with wisdom (Col. 3:16)

Doing what the Word of God says will bring us together.
When we live together in unity we honour Jesus' prayer (John
17: 20-23): "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for
those who will believe in me through their message, that all
of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in
you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that
you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave
me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in
me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world
know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have
loved me."

Responding to God's Word:

Allow 7 to 10 minutes for people to respond to the message.
Invite people to express how they feel about being part of
God's many people.

Confessing Prayer:

The prayer found in HWB 696 is very appropriate, especially
if it follows a time of personal silent confession.

Responding song:

HWB 322 *For we are strangers no more*

Benediction:

Our Father in heaven, as we get ready to leave this place of
worship, we thank you for Jesus Christ, who is our peace,
who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the
dividing wall of hostility. We are no longer strangers to each
other. Regardless of any kind of diversity or difference, we are
your many people. The world will know that you are in us,
and that we are in you, as we love each other with pure hearts.
May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Note: All the scriptures mentioned are from the New
International Version (1984)