

Mennonite Heritage Sunday, October 28, 2014

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

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

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Introduction:

This worship resource is brought to Mennonite congregations as an aid in preparing for Heritage Sunday. Each year we intentionally remember our past, for our history provides roots for our faith as Mennonites. We look back, seeking to discern spiritual truths from past efforts to live as a faithful people, looking for ways they can guide us in the present and as we look to the future.

'Family' has shaped us as a people, for families serve as incubators of faith formation. The congregation supports this domestic faith community with people and programs that help Christian faith take root in our lives; that help us see what God is doing in and around us.

What family means continues to change in the 21st century. Families were once identified as extended families or clans. The 20th century largely replaced this with the idea of nuclear families. Today this understanding is expanding to include step and blended families. Whatever 'family' means to you, God is present and works in families. The Holy Spirit indwells and guides families; nudging them to be agents of positive change in a changing world.

How do we extend the term 'family' to include people with differing backgrounds? By following the biblical example...

Theme: *Families of Faith*

Texts:

Deuteronomy 29: 2-15, Ruth 1:11-21, Matthew 1: 1-17,
Romans 11:13-24

Gathering/Call to worship

- HWB 716 "No one can lay any foundation..."

Hymns:

- HWB 43 "Christ is our cornerstone"
- HWB 6 "Here in this place"
- HWB 14 "Come, we that love the Lord"

Invocation:

- SS 146

Prayer of Confession:

- HWB 696

Affirmation of Faith:

- HWB 421 "Bless'd be the tie that binds"
- HWB 420 "Heart with loving heart united"

Offering Prayer:

- Spoken prayers – SJ 148
- Sung prayers – HWB 393 "A charge to keep I have"

Story, Testimony, or Children's Time:

Invite a panel of people representing the different kinds of families present within your congregation to briefly share a past experience where God was present in their lives during times of struggle or hardship. How did they experience God through others in your congregation or faith family? Conclude with a brief prayer of thanks that we are all part of God's family and can all be God with skin on for each other.

Sermon Notes:

"*Families of Faith.*" The scriptures this morning focus on the role of family within our congregations. Our churches have within them biological and chosen families of many shapes, sizes, and combinations. Some families are new to Canada, as Mennonites once were. Some families have developed deep roots within our congregations over time. All families' roots are sustained through love which breaks boundaries of classism, racism, and other 'isms' that separate us. How can we create families of faith that extend beyond our bloodlines? How can we move toward knowing the other? In Deuteronomy, God establishes a people, whereas the story of Ruth emphasizes the ability to choose faith and family different than that of our ancestry.

Moses renews the covenant that God had established with the people of Israel at Mt. Horeb. Addressing the people of Israel to prepare them to move from the wilderness into the Promised Land, Moses challenges this family of faith to remember the Lord their God and God's sustaining actions during their lengthy wilderness sojourn. This covenant community is reminded to never forget the saving works of the God of their ancestors in Egypt. Similarly, we should never forget the stories of our Mennonite ancestors. What are your congregation's faith shaping ancestral stories?

The passage in Ruth illustrates a contrasting topic, that of 'chosen' families. The book of Ruth focuses on one family, and reveals the themes of loyalty and fidelity which keep this family together. Ruth, the widowed Moabite daughter-in-law of Naomi, decides to stay with her mother-in-law, choosing the faith and family to which she will belong. By choosing the faith of Naomi, Ruth demonstrates that God's love extends beyond the people of Israel to people of every nation. Later in the Old and New Testaments, we learn that Ruth is the ancestor of both King David and Jesus, teaching us all how new family members play important roles in the 'passing on' of faith and peoplehood.

The first chapter of Matthew recites the genealogy or family ancestors of Jesus. From God establishing a faith family clan in Deuteronomy, to Ruth, the Moabite, choosing the faith of her Israelite husband and mother-in-law, to the royal ancestor, King David, the people hearing this genealogy would recognize Jesus as a fulfillment of Scripture. As they hear Jesus' genealogy, the Jews who first received this gospel would recall the faithful life stories of the people who came before them. Hearing the names and recalling the stories of faithful people still provide examples for new generations to follow. What have you learned from past leaders in your church?

Finally, in Romans 11 we read about the 'grafting' in of the Gentiles into the family of God. As new Mennonites or new Canadians, our faith and life journeys have led us to Mennonite congregations. God's blessing falls on each person and family, as our struggles and successes provide examples to others within our churches and neighbourhoods. Each branch, each new graft and family system is both tied to and important to God. Thanks be to God for faith bonds that are even stronger than bloodlines.

Hymn of Response:

- HWB 397 "God loves all his many people"
- Prayer of the Church: (Begin your prayers with the declaration of what unites us as God's family found in SS 200)

Closing Hymn:

- HWB 429 "Go now in peace"
- HWB 322 "For we are strangers no more"

Sending:

- SJ 156

This worship resource was prepared for Mennonite Church Canada by Korey Dyck, Director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Please direct your comments about Special Sunday Worship Resources to Elsie Rempel at erempel@mennonitechurch.ca.