

Community-Developed

Authors: Ryan Siemens, Ben Borne, Duff Warkentin, Cindy Wallace
Church: Mennonite Church Canada Assembly
Date: 2016

This resource is part of a larger **Community Developed Resources** collection available as an inspirational resource to teachers, ministers and others. Posted by permission of the author. Permission to reproduce and distribute is granted.

2016 Assembly Worship

Saskatoon, SK

July 6-10, 2016

Wednesday Evening

Covenant Imagination

Call to Worship

Written by Ryan Siemens

- L As we gather here on the banks of the South Saskatchewan, we come to offer the Lord our songs:
- C We offer our songs of joy and excitement for gathering us together in this place,**
- L We offer our songs of thanksgiving for God's ongoing faithfulness and steadfast love.
- C We offer our songs of lament for the losses we have experienced and the changes we did not expect.**
- L We offer our songs of confession for the harm we have caused when we failed to listen or love.
- C We offer our songs of anxiety for the changes that are upon us.**
- All *And through all these we offer our songs of hope to you for you are a God of covenant, who through the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, are always with us, this day and forever more.***

Opening Prayer

Written by Ryan Siemens

O God of Hope,
By your covenant, you have bound yourself to your people; you refuse to let us go.
Remember your covenant today, O Lord, and throughout this week. Remember that you

created us to be your people; diverse, yet centred upon you. Therefore grant us what we need to live faithfully as a church. And be with us in our times of worship and our times of business, in our fellowship and in our feasting, in our listening and in our sharing, and in our trust of you and one another. We pray this in the name of Jesus, our Lord, Amen.

Hymn: What is this place HWB 1

Offertory Prayer & Offering

Offering designation

Music is spirit language. Singing together draws us closer to the Spirit of God. Singing together transforms and inspires us. MennoMedia, the publishing ministry partner of Mennonite Church Canada (and Mennonite Church USA) is developing a new song collection for 2020 in both book and digital form. Your financial generosity will bring the gift of music for the next season and to the next generation of being the church in a changing world.

Prayer

Through your son Jesus Christ we are given the possibility of singing a song of hope each day! We give thanks for how in singing together, You are able to touch us deeply, moving us to joy, to comfort, to challenge in serving You. Receive these gifts, so that our singing for the next season of being your church we would continue to give witness to your world coming to our world. AMEN

Hymn: Obey my voice HWB 163

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Sermon

Hymn: There's a wideness in God's mercy HWB 145

Benediction/Blessing into the evening's business session

Thursday Morning

God's Covenant with Abram & Sarai

Call to Worship

Opening Prayer

Hymn: Hamba nathi(Come, walk with us) StJ 2
Rain down StJ 49

Biblical Storytelling

Covenant with Abram and Sarai

Written by Garth Ewert Fisher, edited by Lois Siemens with input from Stephanie Siemens & Bruce Jantzen

Resource reference: *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* by Frederick Buechner, and *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who* by Frederick Buechner

Instructions:

- Consider expanding this to include the stories of *The Other* around this covenant - Hagar, Ishmael from Genesis 16. Explore how God interacts with those we normally see as outside the covenant.
- Change the places like "Midtown Plaza" to reflect your situation.

Sarah The place to start is with a woman...laughing.
She's an old woman, and after a lifetime in the desert,
her face is cracked and crannied like a six-month drought.
She is standing at the door of a tent
tears running down her cheeks,
rocking back and forth,
leaning hard against the frame,
turning inward to hide the sound
erupting from her mouth.
The sound of laughter.

Abraham Sarai is her name, and Abram her husband.
So far they have had quite a life, the old pair. Started off in Mesopotamia.
A nice house in the suburbs with a two car garage, a 50 inch colour TV and a BBQ pit.

One room all fixed up for when the babies would start coming.
(*A young couple walks across the stage, in love, confident, secure...*)
They had what is known as good prospects, a future.
Sarai shopped at the Midtown Plaza, volunteered at City Hospital.
Abe was pulling down a six-figure salary with generous fringe benefits and an excellent retirement plan.

And then...
they got religion, or religion got them, and Abram heard the voice of the Lord,
"Go from your country and your parents and grandparents and cousins
to the land that I will show you."
Pull up stakes and head out to a place
I will make you the parents of a great nation.

Sarah and Abraham A great nation! (*laughs*)
A great nation?? (*incredulous*)

Abraham That's where the trouble started. It took awhile to convince Sarai.
They put their house on the market,
got a good price for the never used cribs and bassinets.
Abe resigned his position and left amidst the jeers of, "you're crazy!"
Went down to the dealership
for the latest model in Camels, no power-steering but air-conditional standard!
They hitched up the U-Haul and headed off west,
towards...??
towards the land that God would show them.
They camped and moved and settled and moved
and in the meantime they grew older
and older
and the idea of parenthood became
less and less
and the laughter which started out as part of their journey grew quieter
and quieter
and the idea of being parents
the promise of being the parents of a great nation seemed a distant memory.

All the leading experts agreed:
All the evidence pointed to the fact:
Sarai was barren.

and yet:
The Lord spoke again,
Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are,

northwards and southwards and eastwards and westwards;
for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.
I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth;
I will make your descendants as the stars in the sky.
Abe fell on his face and laughed.
A cracked and crazy idea
for these baren and broken down bodies.

and yet:
The Lord took their seeds of belief and enacted a covenant.
A heifer a female goat and a ram, a turtle-dove and a pigeon
were cut in half and set on an altar.
God caused a deep and terrifying darkness and sleep to fall upon Abram.
And then a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between the pieces.

And Abram believed.

Sarah And Sarai was still barren.

Abraham The Lord came again and changed their names to Abraham and Sarah.
The years rolled by like empty baby-carriages until finally
when Abe was a hundred and Sarah turned ninety
three visitors approached their tent.
And a welcome feast was made of cake, curds and calf.
Abraham ate with the men. Sarah watched from the tent.
The visitor spoke into their long wait.
"I will return in due season and your wife shall have a son."

Sarah Sarah's an old woman, and after a lifetime in the desert,
her face is cracked and crannied like a six-month drought.
She is standing at the door of the tent
tears running down her cheeks,
rocking back and forth,
leaning hard against the frame,
turning inward to hide the sound erupting from her mouth.
The sound of laughter.
Laughing at the image of a round belly
and a baby being born in the geriatric ward.

Abraham The visitor called Sarah out - "You laughed!"

Sarah "I did not!"

Abraham "Oh yes, you did laugh."

Sarah In due season the barren woman

Abraham and the elderly man

Abraham and Sarah welcomed a child into their family. *(Begin walking off stage, turn and tell the audience)* And named him ... Laughter.

(An elderly couple walks across the stage with a baby or baby carriage...)

Silent Reflection on Biblical Storytelling

Hymn: Lord of our growing years HWB 479

Blessing

Hymn: My life flows on HWB 580

Thursday Evening

Call to Worship StJ 183

Hymn: Come and fill our hearts StJ 59

Evening Prayer

Written by Cindy Wallace

All: By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept.
How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

L: God knows when we sit down and when we rise up;
God discerns our thoughts from far away.
Where can we go from God's Spirit?
Where can we flee from God's presence?

All: If we fly up to the heavens, You are there.
If we make our bed in the depths, You are there.
If we rise on the wings of the morning
or settle on the far side of the sea,
even there Your hand will guide us,
and Your right hand will hold us fast.

L: For God formed us as a people;
God's Spirit birthed us anew.
Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

All: You have written us on the palms of your hands.
You have put Your law within us, even written it in our hearts.
You have made with us a covenant of love.
You will be our God, and we will be your people.

L: So lie down and sleep in peace tonight—

All: You alone, O Lord, make us lie down in safety. Amen.

Hymn: Kyrie eleison HWB 144

Friday Morning

God's Covenant at Sinai

Call to Worship

Opening Prayer

Hymn: I will call upon the Lord StJ 19
You are holy StS 34

Biblical Storytelling

The Covenant of the Ten Commandments
Exodus 20: 1-19

Written by Bruce Jantzen with input from Garth Ewert Fisher, Lois Siemens, and Stephanie Siemens

Resource Reference: *Exodus: Believers Church Bible Commentary* by Waldemar Janzen

Instructions:

The Refrain are words of grace which accompany each commandment. We noticed that the words of grace precedes the words of law so we wanted to surround the law with grace. We turned them into words of prayer. The prayers can be modified to reflect more aspects of the commandment.

Consider expanding these words to include the agreement of the people to the covenant and the ritual celebration in Exodus 24. Consider adding other instruments to build sound for each commandment.

- 1 We were tired of walking, seeming to go nowhere. This large, imposing mountain, Sinai they call it, seems to be our resting place, for now. This feels like a mighty place; a holy, somehow comfortable, yet still imposing, place. Though we are frightened of this God who demands that we do not even touch the mountain, I am strangely drawn to know Him. I just can't imagine how God could make us, this worthless group of ex-slaves, into a people, into God's own people, in this barren wasteland. Is it even possible?

Sound: triangle

Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to

the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites (*Exodus 19:3-6 NRSV*)

Sound: Drum - drum roll / cymbals crescendo

And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery."

1 **No gods before me**

2 Immortal, all-powerful God, you free us from drudgery.

All O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **No images**

3 Living, Breathing God, draw us to yourself.

All O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **No misuse of God's Name**

4 God, our constant companion, you release us from death

All (with faith) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **Remember the Sabbath**

3 God who stoops, stays, speaks; liberate us from our burdens

All (Slowly, with rests) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **Honour your parents**

2 God, our Hope, you reclaim us from the wasteland

All (with hope) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **No murder**

4 God, Creator of every being, you deliver us from oppression

All (with love) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **No adultery**

3 God of unconditional, steadfast, fidelity, recover us from abuse

All (with loud lament) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **No theft**

4 God, of infinite mercy, you redeem us from sin

All (with mercy) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **No false witness**

2 God, our listening ear, you return us to belonging

All (with joy) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

1 **No coveting**

3 Emmanuel, God with us, you bring us out from bondage

All (with release) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

Silence

1 "Hear, O People: The Lord our God, the Lord is One! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

All (as a three part round) O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! And all the people said, "amen!"

Silent Reflection on Biblical Storytelling

Hymn: Great is thy faithfulness

HWB 327

Blessing

Saturday Morning

God's Promised Covenant to the Exiles

Call to Worship

Opening Prayer

Hymn:	We sing to you, O God Shepherd me, O God	StJ 1 HWB 519
--------------	---------------------------------------------	------------------

Biblical Storytelling

The Covenant with the Exilic community
Psalm 137, Jeremiah 29, 31:31-34

Written by Lois Siemens with input from Garth Ewert Fisher, Bruce Jantzen & Stephanie Siemens

Instructions

Consider expanding the idea that the exiles are to pray for the other - the city of Babylon - for in its welfare lies their own welfare. Also there are a few connections to the mosaic covenant in the images of seeking and finding; scattering and gathering from Deuteronomy 4 and 29-30; passages in Ezekiel like chapter 11, which could be developed. How difficult it would be for the exiles to pray for their enemies and feel confident that God would meet them in worship without the temple rituals.

God is sitting somewhere on stage throughout. Begin with Voice 1 air-writing words: break, false, violate

2 walks in...

2 What are you doing?

1 I'm trying to remember all the things our rabbi's and priests said about covenant in the.... *voice breaks...* in the temple in Jerusalem...
(quite quickly and with anger)

Do not be false to your covenant
do not violate your covenant
IF you break the covenant
You have made a covenant with death

You have forsaken your covenant.
Be careful NOT to FORGET the covenant

2 *(interrupts)* I also heard them say that God WILL NOT forget the covenant
God WILL NOT ABANDON the covenant
God established it, made it, carries it, keeps it.

1 *(interrupts and spits out the words)* We have corrupted and profaned the covenant
all is lost... lost....

2 *unsure...* God will remember and if this covenant is no longer viablethen.....well.....
(both hang their heads and comfort each other in silence)

Why are you thinking about this now? Is it because of yesterday?

1 *(hands 2 a paper)* This is how I want to remember yesterday.

2 *(1 adds lines as it feels right to do so...)* By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our harps.
For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'
How could we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.

Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, 'Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!'
O daughter Babylon,
you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall they be who take your little ones.....

I can't read that last line.....

Together they stand in silence and grief.....

Then - to break the tension- a little comic relief....It also connects us with a biblical metaphor of God's love for the church.

Audience notices two men who have been sleeping by the stairs or come running in from the back. They are the postmen who get up, yawn, stretch, put letter packs on their backs and start running toward 1&2 who don't see them. The postman come up to 1&2 and are completely out of breath. They can't get a word out they are huffing and puffing so hard.

1 Elasah, son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiyah. How wonderful to see you. You have come all this way? from Jerusalem? Have you brought news? from Jeremiah? (*Jer 29:3*) *Postman hands over a scroll*

1 looks at it, puzzled and then begins reading.....

How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful!
Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats moving down the slopes of Gilead.....

P No no no!

The postman snatches it out of V1's hand and rummages in the sack to find the right scroll, checks it, and hands it to V1.

1 *opens it* Are you sure?
To the remaining elders among the exiles....

2 (*interrupts*) We should wait till everybody is together to read it.

1 Elasah and Gemariah. Thank you for risking so much to bring us these words. Take this back to Jeremiah (*hands over the other scroll*) and call it.... Psalm 137.
Go get some rest and meet us here later.

Come to front of stage and 'gather' people.

1 Thank you all for coming on such short notice. We received a letter today from our prophet Jeremiah and would like to read it to you.

To the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: (*appalled! based on Jeremiah 29:24-32*)

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease, but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

....*keep reading and gradually fade out* ¹¹For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the Lord....

3 *(begins to speak over the fading words)*

The days are surely coming,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt
—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord.
But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days:
I will put my law within them,
and I will write it on their hearts;
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
No longer shall they teach one another,
or say to each other, “Know the Lord,”
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,
for I will forgive their iniquity,
and remember their sin no more.

A single voice representing the exiles begins to sing Psalm 23: HWB 519 Shepherd us O God, beyond our wants, beyond our fears from death into life. The congregation gradually joins in the refrain while the voice sings the verses.

Silent Reflection on Biblical Storytelling

Hymn: Gentle Shepherd, come and lead us

HWB 352

Blessing

This season calls for a listening presence to God and one another, creativity and diligence, courage and risk taking, prayerful decision making. In all of this God's unfailing love and covenant of peace are the sure foundation on which to build and lead.

All We commit to pray for you and those yet to be appointed to the Transition Team. We commit to participate in this national process of change for our church.

We want to sing a song of sending and blessing for you in your work and ministry on behalf of Mennonite Church Canada.

Congregational Song: The Lord lift you up StJ 73

L "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken, nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10)

In all that changes, God's unfailing love and God's covenant of peace continues with us. AMEN.

Evening Prayer:

Written by Cindy Wallace

All By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept.
How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

L God knows when we sit down and when we rise up;
God discerns our thoughts from far away.
Where can we go from God's Spirit?
Where can we flee from God's presence?

All If we fly up to the heavens, You are there.
If we make our bed in the depths, You are there.
If we rise on the wings of the morning
or settle on the far side of the sea,
even there Your hand will guide us,
and Your right hand will hold us fast.

L For God formed us as a people;
God's Spirit birthed us anew.
Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

All You have written us on the palms of your hands.
You have put Your law within us, even written it in our hearts.
You have made with us a covenant of love.
You will be our God, and we will be your people.

L So lie down and sleep in peace tonight—

All You alone, O Lord, make us lie down in safety. Amen.

Hymn: I will come to you in the silence StS 49

Sunday Morning Worship Service

The New Covenant

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

Written by Ryan Siemens

- L In the days of Abram & Sarai,
God called them to leave what was familiar, country, kindred and family,
To go to a new place, to begin a new people.
- All Looking to the stars in the sky,
God promised a new future Abram and Sarai could not see.
- L In the days of Moses,
the words of God were written on tablets of stone,
as the sign of a covenant
between God and all of God's people.
- All In the tablets of stone,
we see the sign of God's hope
for each to live in peace with God and neighbour.
- L In the days of the prophet,
God promised to place a new covenant in the hearts of God's people.
- All No longer shall we teach one another
or say to the other,
"know the Lord"
for we all will know the Lord, from the greatest to the least.
- L In the days of Jesus Christ,
The Word became flesh,
The New Covenant became blood.
- All As members of the living Body of Christ,
we see the sign of God's promise among us.
Let us now abide with one another in worship.

Opening Prayer

will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live in the LORD's house
as long as I live.

- 2 This is the banquet table of our Lord.
Even in the face of our differences,
Jesus invites us to receive
the slow food of bread and cup.
Jesus is more than enough to
form us as God's people
of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- 1 In preparation to for communion we invite you to a time of silence to bring your
confession to God. We will then conclude by praying the Lord's Prayer as found in
HWB #731.

The Bread

- 2 While they were eating,
Jesus took a loaf of bread,
and after blessing it he broke it, *(break bread)*
gave it to the disciples,
and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." *(bring the two parts of the
bread back together)*
- 1 *Prayer for the Bread*
God of grace,
Though the power of death is strong,
The power of your love is stronger.

Thank you for the bread of Christ;
At this table and in our daily lives.
May your Spirit feed us;
nourishing our bodies, our church and our world. AMEN

The bread is served. (all wait to eat together)

- 2 The Bread of Life, eat and be nourished.

The Cup

1 Then he took a cup, (*raise the cup*)
and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying,
“Drink from it, all of you;
for this is the sign of the new covenant
which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

2 *Prayer for the Cup*
Abundant God,
As we drink this cup
May your Spirit renew the covenant of love
made possible because of Jesus,
Which binds us to you and one another. AMEN

The juice is served. (all wait to drink together)

1 The Cup of Joy; taste and see that the Lord is good.

Congregational Prayer of Thanksgiving

HWB 789

Benediction

Hymn: Praise God from whom

HWB 118