

Complete Service – In My Sister’s House

Fifth Sunday of Easter (Year A), Memorial Sunday, Mother’s Day

This worship service is based on Gerry Wolfram’s poem “In my Sister’s House.” Gerry draws on John 14:1-14 and invites us to imagine the Holy One as a quilt maker who prepares a place for us – a home filled with the warmth and welcome of quilts. The service can be used in the Easter season; the John 14:1-14 text falls on the fifth Sunday of Easter in Year A. Since we are invited to reflect on the way God’s spirit is present with us in our dying and death, the service may also be appropriate for Memorial Sunday. We also found this to be a lovely service for Mother’s Day, drawing on feminine images of the Holy One and acknowledging the rich tradition of quilting among our mothers and grandmothers.

Congregants were invited in advance to bring homemade quilts to the service. During the singing of a hymn, they brought their quilts forward and draped them over the choir pews at the front of the church. Together we created a rich visual image of “In my sister’s house are many quilts.”

Order of Service

Focus Statement:

We have experienced God as an intimate presence in our lives. As we reflect on the Easter story and our own death and dying, how might we imagine the ways God’s spirit is also present to us in this passage of our lives?

Gathering

Prelude

Hymn — *Voices Together* 34 We Praise You, O God, Our Redeemer

Welcome & Announcements

Call to worship:

Gently, tenderly,

the Holy Quilter gathers

the scraps

and patches

the odds and ends

of our lives

patiently piecing and pressing the
bold and bright
sad and sorrowful
baffled and befuddled
wild and wondrous

Holy Imagination at play
teases out patterns
lays out designs
stitches motifs

and beyond our timid, feeble hopes
the disparate scraps
the peculiar patches of our lives
are quilted into
an artistry of Love.

Prayer:

Gather us, Holy Spirit,
and hold us in your creative hands.
Open us to your piecing and pressing,
your patching and stitching
your designing and shaping.
In all the seasons of our living and dying,
we entrust ourselves into
the beauty and artistry of your love.
Amen.

Hymn—*Voices Together* 134 Bring Many Names (verses 1, 2, 3, 6)

Reflecting

Scripture:

Psalm 139:13-18, John 14:1-4

Poet's Introduction:

Our scripture text this morning from John 14 recalls the time of Jesus' approaching death. The disciples are anxious and fearful of losing him, but Jesus reassures them that death is not the final word nor is it a final separation from those we love. While this account has always in-

trigued me, it has also felt rather “unfinished.” In some translations, such as “In my father’s house are many mansions” or “many rooms,” the poetry drew me. However, the image of these rooms seemed cold and uninviting.

The Holy Spirit has always presented itself to me as the liveliest and most accessible face of God. So I reached for a sentence that began “In my sister’s house...” and the rest followed. One of my sisters is a dedicated quilter, so I imagined the Holy One as a quilt maker and quilts as the intimate medium of her creation. In writing this, I have realized what a powerful symbol quilts can be and what strong associations they have for us.

One word of explanation: In the second stanza of the poem, you will hear reference to a “chuppa.” In Jewish tradition, a chuppa is a canopy which is used, for example, in a wedding ceremony. It symbolizes a future home with a rooftop covering and sides left open to the world.

Poetry:

“In My Sister’s House” by Gerry Wolfram (2023)

In my Sister’s house are many quilts.
She goes now to prepare a place for you.

There are quilts of warmth and welcome,
quilts that speak of generations,

quilts remembering
the maker –

She who made them gathered up
the bits of all things broken,

made them whole and beautiful as signs of new life:
comfort, healing, resurrection.

Quilts say welcome; you are precious,
quilts say refuge and community – communion of saints.

i) Welcome

Friend of a friend
was how he heard of her.
His car broke down
half-way across the country

so he showed up
at her door
disheartened,
cold and broke.

She set out food
for him and listened
to his story: *heard*
there's work out west

he said. *I hope it's true.*
Internal refugee, displaced
from home and family
becomes a guest in this, her house.

While making up the spare
room bed, she tells him:
this old quilt is good and warm –
it's one my grandma made

passed down to me. Later
on his chest and limbs he feels
the weight of warmth and history
and finds his place in this, a borrowed family.

Instrumental music

ii) Shelter

A girl-child crawls beneath
the quilting frame,

safe in her little house
whose undulating chuppa roof
reflects the hands of women –
neighbours gathered in the farmhouse
sewing through soft layers
until a pattern is revealed.

All the while a murmuring
of women talking, women
listening, laughing, passing thread
or scissors, lozenges or lifesavers
across the bobbing quilt top.

Father comes home from the field
and greets the quilters who cajole
him into sewing one small section,
praise his stitches, regular and careful
just like when he's seeding in the spring.

Girl curls forgotten underneath her canopy –
she falls asleep and stays all afternoon
sheltered in the presence of the holy.

Instrumental music

iii) In the making

Sister Spirit, Comforter, Homemaker –
with you are all things saved
and nothing left behind or wasted:

homegrown quilts with sugar sacks for backing,
monumental quilts that honor millions,
names that spread for acres.
You may have led a formulaic life: Log Cabin,
Double Wedding Ring and Pin Wheel or perhaps
you favored Crazy Quilts, abandoning
arithmetic for artful play.

*When life gives you scraps,
make a quilt.* The scraps may be your poverty,
unending labour or the luxury of time that's surplus on your hands.

The scraps may be leftovers or reminders
of your failures – never mind. Empty out
the rag bag – bring whatever's there.

The quiltmaker repurposes
and with her art makes all things new

she borrows colours from the birds
her shapes from a kaleidoscope.
And in creating, she is recreated.

Instrumental music

iv) This remnant love

Each day the signs of habitation
grow. Beside the tidy raised beds
of the new community garden

a tent-like shelter first appears.
Some empty water bottles
prove the park is home to someone.

Even though it's June, the public washroom's
locked and out-of-bounds.

A shopping cart shows up

containing items scavenged
from back lanes that might
still be of use. But most

surprising, at the entrance
to the tent – a home-made quilt peeks out
one morning after it has rained.
Though ragged, it conveys the quilter's care

and craft
the maker's promise of
eternal home.

Instrumental music

Sharing of Quilts:

During the hymn, congregants brought their quilts forward and draped them over the choir pews at the front of the church.

Hymn—*Voices Together* 44 We Long to Know Her

Storytelling

Children's Story Suggestion:

Focus on a pieced quilt, like the ones Mennonite Central Committee sends around the world to people in need. Talk about how we are wrapped up and held in Love.

Hymn—*Sing the Journey* 93 When I'm lonely and defenseless (verses 1, 2)

Quilting Stories:

Two (or more) congregants may share stories of quilting and faith.

Hymn—*Sing the Journey* 93 When I'm lonely and defenseless (verses 3, 4)

Poetry:

"The Blessing of Sister Spirit" by Gerry Wolfram

Sister Spirit gives assurances
and keeps her promises:
trust that where I am you may be also.

*Do not let your heart be troubled
for you know the way.*

Even now she makes a quilt for you;
If it were not so I would have told you.

Sharing

Offering

Prayers of the People

Sending

Hymn – *Voices Together* 368 Spirit of Life

Benediction:

In all your living and in all your dying,
Sister Spirit makes a quilt for you,
wrapping you in grace,
and covering you in compassion.

Now and always,
the Holy Comforter enfolds you in love.

Poems: Gerry Wolfram (Canada), 2023. Home Street Mennonite Church

Parts of Worship: Judith Friesen Epp (Canada), 2023. Home Street Mennonite Church

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