

WORSHIP RESOURCES

for Evangelism and Church Planting Sunday, April 11, 1999

Introduction:

Following are ideas that will help you plan for worship on Evangelism and Church Planting Sunday, April 11, 1999. The lectionary scriptures for that Sunday are Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31. A suggested theme is "Blessed Are Those Who Come To Believe."

Call to Worship:

Option A (from Psalm 16 and John 20:29):

Leader: I bless the Lord who gives me counsel.

People: In the night also my heart instructs me.

Leader: You show me the path of life.

People: In Your presence there is fullness of joy.

Leader: Your help brings pleasure forevermore.

People: Blessed are those who come to believe in you.

Option B:

A Litany: God's Call to Life

L: All life is a call and a response. God calls us into creation. God calls us into life. How we live and how we worship is our response to God. As we share in this call to awareness, let our response be "God calls us to this day." God calls us to life! God calls each of us to move among the creations of this world and bring joy and renewing love.

P: God calls us to this day!

L: God calls us to love, to plunge ourselves into the hurts and the horrors, to give ourselves fully to those who are in need. God calls us to be present to those who are without love. God calls us this day.

P: God calls us this day!

L: God calls us to worship, to dance, to respond, to share our joy and sadness, shedding our self-consciousness and fear and clothing ourselves with peace. No longer can we afford to wait. We are builders for our God. God calls us to this day!

P: God calls us today!

L: In God we live and move and have our being.

All: We now commit ourselves to our brothers and sisters and the task God gives us. Amen.

Option C:

#676, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

"O God, you withdraw from our sight that you may be known by our love.

Help us to enter the cloud where you are hidden and surrender all our certainty to the darkness of faith in Jesus Christ. Amen."

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Hymns That Relate to the Scriptures and Theme

From *Hymnal, A Worship Book*:

- “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less,” 343
- “I Know Not Why God’s Wondrous,” 338
- “We Walk by Faith,” 570
- “’Tis Not with Eyes of Flesh We See,” 571
- “O God in Restless Living,” 557

Songs from Other Sources:

- “Faith Is the Victory”
- “He Lives (I Serve a Risen Savior)”
- “Only Believe, Only Believe”
- “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”
- “I Have Decided To Follow Jesus”
- “There Is a Redeemer”

Doxology (to the tune of “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore”):

1. “Spirit, be our breath of life, Alleluia... (2 times)
2. “Spirit, be our wind of change, Alleluia... (2 times)
3. “Spirit, be our fire that warms, Alleluia... (2 times)
4. “Spirit, help us share our gifts, Alleluia... (2 times)

Children’s Story:

Option A: Interview a few children who have recently started attending church. Ask what they like about church. Ask the other children, and perhaps a few adults or youth, why they come to church. Encourage the children to invite others who have no church home to visit their congregation.

Option B: Discuss with the children about what it means to be blessed. Tell the story of Jesus appearing to the disciples (John 20:19-32) and sending them to share with others. Talk about what a blessing it can be when people come to believe in Jesus.

Prayer Suggestions:

“Lord of life, we are among those who have not seen and yet believe. Yet often, we are like Thomas, wishing for a sign—assurance that you are the Christ, the Son of God. Thank you for your gospel that invites us to believe, for the forgiveness of doubt, for your peace that calms our fear, for your resurrection that gives us life. Give us the courage to share these signs of your presence so that others, through believing, may have life in your name. Amen.

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A Litany for Strengthening the Church (responsively)

Because we want to serve you, holy, loving God, we ask you in grace to receive our prayers for your church, that she may realize and be strengthened by her unity in Christ; and so:

We pray you to hear us, our God.

We are inspired by the challenge that your church shall shine as a light in the world, proclaiming the Good News to everyone, and declaring the liberating truth of the gospel. Help us to be the word that draws people together in Christ; and so:

We pray you to hear us, our God.

We remember the challenge that your church is to remember the sheep outside the fold, seek out the wandering and lost, proclaim forgiveness of sins, hold a heart full of compassion for all humanity, and defend the cause of the poor and oppressed; and so:

We pray you to hear us, our God.

We desire that your Church may remember to be guided by the Holy Spirit, so that we may teach what we learn; that we may truly follow Christ, as we seek to speak truth to the powerful and to the weak; to be ourselves an example of what we command to societies and states, and so:

As you sent Jesus to carry love into the world, send us now and empower us to be your witnesses. We need your strength, and so we pray you to hear us, our God. Amen.

Sermon: How I Came To Believe That Jesus Is the Messiah (A Monologue by Thomas)

Hello. My name is Thomas and I have been asked to tell you how I came to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the one sent by God.

I first met Jesus when he came to our community preaching and teaching and healing. Many people came to see and hear him and at first, I was just another face in the crowd. I had met traveling rabbis before but never anyone who spoke like Jesus did or one who was able to help people with practical problems like he could.

My amazement grew day after day as I heard Jesus teach and saw him heal people and cast out evil spirits. Yes, I was there. I heard and I saw but I did not really understand. Some were saying that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. I wanted to believe that, too. But how can you believe what you cannot understand?

One day, Jesus called a group of us aside and told us that he was appointing 12 apostles who would serve together with him and also be sent out to do the same things he was doing. And then he looked at me and called my name. Can you believe it? He called me! One who understood so little and believed only what he could understand.

Our religious leaders did not believe that this teacher had come from God and opposed him in any way they could. On one of our visits to Jerusalem, they actually took up stones to kill him. He escaped and we left the city.

Shortly after that, Jesus learned that his close friend Lazarus had died, and he told us that he was going to go and raise him to life. We tried to persuade him not to go back onto the home turf of those who wanted to kill him. When I saw that he would not change his mind, I said, "Let's go, too, that we may die with him."

Jesus did raise Lazarus from the dead, and this made the religious leaders all the more determined to kill him. They brought false charges against him and persuaded the Roman governor to put him to death on a cross.

I was sure it was all over. What was I to believe now? I didn't even know what I wanted to believe and I understood less than ever. I went off by myself for a while. I just had to be alone.

On the evening of the third day after Jesus had been crucified, I returned to where I expected to find the other disciples. They were there and when I entered the room, they insisted that they had seen Jesus, that he was alive.

Did I respond with joy and thanksgiving? No. I did not believe them and said, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

We were all together in the room again a week later when Jesus entered without unlocking or opening the doors. He greeted us in the familiar way, "Peace be with you." Then he looked me in the eye and said, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe." I suddenly knew the truth and cried out, "My Lord and My God!" I believed. This one whom I had come to know so well and yet did not really know at all was the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed Son of God. There was still so much that I did not understand but that no longer kept me from believing.

Only upon further reflection did I realize what Jesus had done to help me believe. He did not expect me to depend on my own understanding but addressed my unbelief with words and

signs in order to help me believe. This should not have surprised me. I had seen him do this many times in his teaching and healing ministry, always saying and doing things that would help people to believe.

In that room that day, Jesus continued with these words, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." He was talking about you. He continues to help people to believe in him and rejoices when you, too, help others to believe.

Sometime before this event, he prayed for us and then continued, "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their words..." He was praying for you and for those who come to believe because of your witness. Blessed are those who have come to believe. Blessed are those who help others to believe.

—Prepared by Clarence Epp, Interim Director of Conference of Mennonites in Canada Outreach and Church Planting (To be used freely, edited and changed in any way deemed helpful. Based on Mark 1:16-20; 2:13,14; John 11:1-16; 10:24-31.)

The following suggestions could be included at the end of the sermon or used in a Sunday school class or small group.

1. Briefly share one or two accounts from the scriptures in which Jesus did or said something specific that would have helped the hearers to believe in him, e.g., in Mark 5:35, 36, Jesus gives words of encouragement in spite of a tragic message; in John 9:35, Jesus seeks out the man born blind, now healed but cast out, and invites him to believe; in Acts 9, Jesus appears to Paul.
2. Have several people from the congregation share briefly some specific way in which God has helped them to believe. You may wish to contact individuals ahead of time.
3. Another option would be to ask the congregation to form small groups of three or four people to share stories with one another.
4. Ask a member of the youth group to read Donna's story. (See page 7 of this resource.)
5. Ask several people to prepare to share briefly on what God may be calling your congregation to do in order to help others to believe.

Readers' Theater:

This is composed for four readers sitting on four stools, three to four feet apart, with scripts either placed on four black uniform music stands or with scripts placed in black notebook covers. For best effect, readers should be dressed similarly, preferably in dark clothing. The readers do not face each other, but read looking straight toward audience. Spotlight, with house lights dimmed, if possible.

- 1 I doubt it.
- 2 You doubt it?
- 3 What is doubt?
- 4 Doubt is not believing.
- 2 So what don't you believe?
- 1 That Christ is alive.
- 3 But he said he would come back to life.
- 4 And we saw him!
- 1 Unless I see the prints of the nails in his hands and touch the scar on his side, I WILL NOT believe!

3 But where's your faith?
2 Yes, why can't you believe?
4 Has the evil one clouded your mind?
1 I don't know. I just can't believe. Dead people, you know, just don't get up and start walking.

(PAUSE)

2 Hey, here he is!
4 He is speaking.
2 He is saying, "Peace be with you!"
3 Do you believe now?
4 Yes, do you believe now?
2 Do you need more proof?

(PAUSE)

1 Jesus...the Christ...my Lord and my God! I believe!

(PAUSE)

2 (addressing audience) In this day of cynicism and doubt, do YOU need more proof?
3 Will YOU believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?
4 That believing, YOU might have life through his name?
1 Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!

(For best transition, allow readers to sit in silence for 10-15 seconds as spotlights are dimmed. Have musicians ready to lead "I Serve a Risen Savior" as readers sit back down.)

Evangelism and Church Planting Illustrations and Stories To Use in Sermon or in Other Parts of the Service:

"We tell people that if they will give their hearts to Christ they will find a joy and a peace and a strength that they never knew before. We assure them that the Church can bless their homes and help them to face life. God's laws are the rules by which we are designed to operate; if we break them, we break ourselves. The Bible from beginning to end promises benefits for godliness; think of the Proverbs, the Prophets, the Beatitudes."

—*The Church as Evangelist*, by George E. Sweazey, p. 218

"Evangelism Definition: Evangelism is communicating the good news of the kingdom of God and inviting persons to join the kingdom movement as disciples of Jesus Christ and participants in the community of faith."

—Gary Martin

"Faith is that which, knowing the Lord's will, goes and does it; or not knowing it, stands and waits."

—George Macdonald

"Where reason cannot wade, there faith may swim."

—Thomas Watson

“What are some of the marks of faith?

1. Emotion—quiet but deep emotional feelings stirred within.
2. Energizing—sufficient for action, commitment, relationship.
3. Magnetic quality—a pole or center around which values are organized.

Faith gives life a sense of meaning rather than a list of meanings.”

—Charles Milligan

How I Came To Believe, by Donna Jean Forster (third-year student at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, who is exploring a call to pastoral ministry):

No one wants me; I’m worthless; I’m unlovable; no one cares about me; I’m stupid; I’m no good for anything; I can’t think; I’m a loser; no one likes me; I’m useless.

As a teen, these are things that went through my head all the time. These things are not only what I thought, but they are what I believed to be true. These were not simple statements of “fact” because they were accompanied by fists, 2x4’s, belts, pots, spoons, hammers, kicking, and slams into walls just to make sure I believed them. I determined that a life this hard just wasn’t worth living. I needed answers.

Why did no one want to love me? Why was I worthless? What had I done to deserve this life? Why was life so difficult for me and so easy for others? Why? Why? Why? Why?

I was angry, mad at the world for giving me this huge burden to bear. I was angry because no one noticed my sufferings, because no one cared enough to get involved. I was angry because I couldn’t share my hurts with anyone. I was angry because no one could tell me why I had to suffer. I was angry because that was the only way I knew how to express myself.

I entered high school as an angry, lonely, lost, and messed-up kid. Yet, I was searching, looking for answers to my tough questions. Everyone entering high school is thrown together in the same hormonal boat afloat (not always) on the deep sea of pubescent teenage angst. Everyone has the same goal of finding the place where they belong. Where did I belong? I felt like I wasn’t worth belonging anywhere or with anyone. Who would want to be a friend with someone as dumb, ugly, and unlovable as me? I floated alone on the sea for a long time, searching for the dry land upon which I could rest my weary soul. Eventually, by divine design, I spotted a group of people who appeared to be safe enough.

As I cautiously got to know them, I realized that they had a set of values very different from my own. They did their homework; they didn’t go to parties; they didn’t swear; they didn’t drink; they closed their eyes before they ate; and they were happy. They had parents who loved them, who took time out for them, who talked with them, who picked them up after school. They had good memories of the things that happened in their youth. I wondered why they were blessed with all of these things and I wasn’t. Why? Why?

The big thing for me was that these people accepted me as I was. They accepted my foul mouth and my bad attitude. They didn’t condemn me.

Over time, I learned their secret—they were Christians. They went to church and read the Bible. They practiced what they believed.

I was invited to the Christian group that met once a week after school for Bible study and fellowship. I cautiously went, secretly hoping to find some answers. It was here that I learned about Jesus and the gift of saving grace that he has to offer.

I found an old battered Bible tucked away in a drawer at home. It was in this Bible that I

discovered answers. I found a God who cares about bringing his people to the promised land. A God who loves his children enough to see his only son die on a cross for us. A Jesus who taught a new way that was not violent. A new hope for the future because Jesus will come again to judge. I found a new reason to live because my sins were forgiven and I was free to be me. I found a new way of living my life based on the grace that was given to me.

A new joy, hope, love, and peace which passes all understanding began to rule my life. I found dry land. I released my angry self. The “why” question was no longer important. I accepted the gift that Jesus offered to me with his arms outstretched between two thieves on a hill.

Ways To Highlight the Mission Theme:

1. Invite a church planter or a group of members of a new church in your conference or district to share the blessings that come with starting a new church.
2. Ask a newer Christian to share a testimony of the blessings that come with new faith in Christ.

Sending:

Option A:

Group 1: Peace be with you.

Group 2: Peace be with you.

Group 1: Jesus has come and stood among us.

Group 2: Jesus has brought us peace, forgiveness, and life.

Group 1: Even as he was sent, so we are sent,

Group 2: To bring others peace, forgiveness, and life.

Group 1: Blessed are you who believe that Jesus is the Christ.

Group 2: Blessed are you who believe that in Jesus all may have life.

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Option B:

Matthew 5:13-16.

Resources:

For congregations interested in possibly birthing a new church:

Videos: *Planting New Churches: Reaching Out in New Ways*, produced by Church of the Brethren, and *Back to the Future: Church Parenting....A Strategy for the 21st Century*. These videos can be borrowed from the Resource Centre, Conference of Mennonites in Canada (phone: 204-888-6781; e-mail: cmc@confmenno.ca) or the Office of Outreach Ministries, Commission on Home Ministries (phone: 303-499-1565; e-mail: MarilynMiller1@compuserve.com).

The booklet “Laughing with Abraham and Sarah: A Midwife’s Manual,” by Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, has helps for congregations who are interested in birthing a new church. Cost: \$1.00; order from Commission on Home Ministries, Box 347, Newton, Kansas 67114; phone: 316-283-5100; e-mail: chrisg@gcmc.org.

For congregations interested in Living in Faithful Evangelism (LIFE):

A new revised LIFE process is available for use in your congregation. Alumni LIFE churches can enroll in a 13-week module of your choice. Congregations that have not previously gone through the LIFE process can enroll in a revised two-year process. For more information, contact Marilyn Miller (phone: 303-499-1565; e-mail: MarilynMiller1@compuserve.com), Jack Suderman (phone: 204-888-6781; e-mail: RJSuderman@confmenno.ca); Ed Bontrager (phone: 757-595-6889); or Joan Hershey (phone: 1-800-774-3360; e-mail: cocoahersh@aol.com).

A good way for congregations to reach out is to plan a "Friend Sunday." "Called To Be Friends" is a 42-page booklet outlining a plan to prepare congregations to invite visitors. It tells how and why to plan a "Friend Sunday," including a time line to help in schedule planning, sample letters, and a detailed list of who does what. Cost is \$4 plus \$1 shipping. Order from Roma Miller, Mennonite Board of Missions, Box 370, Elkhart, IN 46515; phone: 219-294-7523; e-mail: Roma@mbm.org.

A short video which portrays congregations working together to be a City on a Hill can be borrowed from the Commission on Home Ministries, Box 347, Newton, Kansas 67114; phone: 316-283-5100; e-mail: chrisg@gcmc.org. This video shows how putting evangelism, peace, and service together can make a powerful witness.

This resource was compiled by John Powell, Mennonite Board of Missions; Marilyn Miller, Commission on Home Ministries; Clarence Epp, Conference of Mennonites in Canada Outreach and Church Planting; and Ed Bontrager, Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries.