



**Mennonite
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Worship Resources for

Mennonite Heritage Sunday

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Mennonite Church Canada Formation

Introduction

These worship resources have been designed to assist Mennonite congregations in planning worship for Heritage Sunday. The focus of this denominationally recognized Sunday is on the spiritual heritage of the Mennonite Church, which continues to claim with the Psalmist, “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations” (Ps. 90:1). As we remember our spiritual roots, and the testimonies of those who have been the church before we were born, we contribute to the church’s legacy for future generations.

This particular worship guide has been prepared on behalf of Mennonite Church Canada Formation by Alf Redekopp, Director of Mennonite Church Canada’s Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Theme

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations - Ps. 90:1.

Suggested Bible Texts

Deuteronomy 34: 1-12; Leviticus 19: 1-2; 15-18; Psalm 90:1-6; Psalm 1; I Thessalonians 2: 1-8; Matthew 22:34-46.

Suggested Hymns

HWB 1 *What is this place*

HWB 392 *Heart and mind, possessions, Lord*

HWB 438 *I sing with exultation*

HWB 479 *Lord of our growing years*

HWB 568 *As spring the winter doth succeed*

HWB 583 *Guide me O, Thou Great Jehovah*

HWB 610 *On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand*

STS 50 *Woza nomthwalo wakho (Come, bring your burdens to God)*

STJ 93 *Wehrlos und verlassen sehnt sich (When I’m lonely and defenceless)*

STJ106 *Just a closer walk with thee*

HWB – Hymnal: A Worship Book, STJ – Sing the Journey, STS – Sing the Story

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 3:11

GATHERING

Words of Welcome

Welcome to this service of worship! Today is designated Mennonite Heritage Sunday by the Mennonite Church. In the broader church many Protestant churches are celebrating Reformation Sunday. Our key verse reads ““Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations” (Ps. 90:1). This verse causes us to reflect on God not only as the spiritual place in which we live, but as the place where many generations have found their spiritual home. What is this place...this dwelling place... this promised land...? This place where we love God and our neighbour as ourselves? And so we enter this hour of worship wondering what that means.

Gathering Hymn

HWB 1 *What is this place*

Call to Worship (Based on Psalm 90)

L: *Lord, you have been our dwelling-place*

P: From generation to generation you have been our God.

L: *Before the mountains were brought forth, you formed the earth and the world.*

P: From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

L: *You turn us back to the dust from which we were formed.*

P: A thousand years in your sight are like a dream when it is past.

You satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love.

L: *So come, Praise our God, O people. Let us praise God for God's love in all generations.*

All: We will rejoice and be glad all our days.

PRAISING

HWB 438 *I sing with exultation* (Text: Felix Manz ca. 1526)

HWB 583 *Guide me O, Thou Great Jehovah*

CONFESSION

O God, you rule the world from end to end and for all time.

You alone are God. In you alone we hope.

Yet we confess, O God that our lives are hopelessly cluttered by too much to do.

We are blindly driven by our need to succeed and distracted by our hectic service.

Like the children of Israel, we have often lost our way, we have wandered away from our home in you.

Forgive our double-mindedness. Forgive our addiction to lukewarm faith.

By your Holy Spirit, keep us in your Presence, that we may love you alone with all our heart, soul and strength, and love our neighbour as ourselves, that we may learn afresh that you the source of all love, from generation to generation.

In the name of Jesus, Our Lord. Amen.

Offering

HWB 392 *Heart and mind, possessions, Lord*

HEARING GOD'S WORD

Children's Story

Download the story, "Keeping your Eye on the Ball," from the Mennonite Church Canada lectionary children's story listing. (www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/627)

Scripture Readings

Deuteronomy 34: 1-12; Leviticus 19: 1-2; 15-18; Psalm 90:1-6; Psalm 1; I Thessalonians 2: 1-8; Matthew 22:34-46.

Sermon Prompts

"Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations." (Ps. 90:1)

The texts from the scriptures invite us to wonder about the meaning of "dwelling place" for the exiled, those who feel dislodged, disoriented, unsettled, restless, pursued or who are aimlessly wandering.

Deuteronomy 34 reminds us of our spiritual ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; nomads on a journey to the land that God had promised. Each one of these heroes of the faith had their challenges. Abraham and Sarah were childless; Isaac had a dysfunctional family (twin boys who didn't get along, and a wife who would deceive him in his old age); Jacob ran away from his brother; to name a few examples. Yet, each one continued to carry the promise of God. What does this say for the way our current commissions from God relate to our challenges and shortcomings?

Then we have Moses, who had quite the history of his own. Moses actually ran from God, but God called him at the burning bush to go and lead his people. And lead he did. "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses (friend of God), whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders in Egypt against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel." (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

Moses did not get to enter the Promised Land. We may wonder why. What Moses must have felt about that? Was he sad? ...disappointed? ...angry? Or, was he perhaps even joyful? After all, Moses lived to see the Promised Land. What a way to finish one's days on earth! Had God actually saved the best experience for the last day of his life!? I imagine that Moses experienced God as his closest friend on that day, as he was given a view of the final destiny of the people of God. Connected as this event was to his momentary lapse of judgment (one that may have been his greatest regret in life), Moses may have been able to experience this view of Canaan as the grace of God, in which he could see the land, promised to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob with his own eyes. Or, was his death before entering Canaan his biggest disappointment?

What have our biggest failures and disappointments in life been? What are the stories and moments of grace in the midst of these stories? Stories from the past and present of how God has transformed broken lives, brought people to himself, and saved the best for the last, would be good anecdotal ways of applying the truths in this text to our contexts. They can help us make our dwelling place in God and help us "number our days."

Heritage Faith-story for opening the sermon.

Summary: This story illustrates the single-minded commitment to follow Jesus and the paradox of choosing to be physically homeless which results in experiencing the "dwelling place / resting place " of God".

Adapted from the story in Harry Loewen's *No Permanent City: stories from Mennonite History and Life* (Herald Press, Waterloo, ON, 1993).

The sun had set on Langnau in the Emmenthal Valley near Berne, Switzerland. A lonely man, Uli Steiner was on this way to a nearby village. His wife had left him that evening, and now he followed her in the hope that she would return home with him.

From some distance Uli saw her enter the home of Michel Burkhalter. He watched as other dark figures emerged and then disappeared into this home. Coming closer Uli heard men and women singing in quiet tones.

As he listen he heard "Lord Jesus, help us in our distress...The hour has come... We are hated and persecuted and exiled... There is no place for us on earth". When the singing ended, Uli Steiner heard someone pray fervently and loudly. In the flickering light he could make out a row of kneeling figures toward the back of the room. After the prayer they rose and sat on benches and listened to the words of Michel Burkholder.

Burkholder first spoke of a new mandate which had been issued on April 6, 1693, according to which persons aged fourteen and over must appear before the magistrates and swear an oath of allegiance. Those unwilling to swear would be declared Anabaptists. Moreover, Anabaptist leaders should be arrested and handed over to the authorities. For the capture of a local leader a reward of twenty-five talers was offered and for the capture of one from another region, fifty talers. Anabaptists who refused to take an oath would have until April 17 to leave the country.

Burkholder then spoke of what it meant to be a Christian. Christian faith, he declared, comes from God as a gracious gift. It is received freely and voluntarily with no outside pressure or compulsion.

Burkholder reminded the group that Anabaptist leaders like Felix Manz, George Blaurock and others were drowned, burned or decapitated because of their faith. To believe in Christ means to follow him in life, to do good to all people, to take on oneself the cross of suffering and persecution. "So we too," he concluded, "are ready to pull up stakes and leave our homes. God himself will show us the way. Blessed be the person who can die with him and pray, 'Into your hands I commend my spirit, Lord.' Amen."

When the preaching and the prayer had ended, Uli saw the women in the house weep and embrace and kiss one another. The men looked seriously and with determination at each other. Uli too felt a tear roll down his cheek. He slowly turned and headed for home. Now he knew he had lost his wife.

On April 17, 1693, a group of men, women and children left Langnau. They carried baskets and chest filled with their few earthly possessions. In the cool shade of a forest the homeless wanderers would rest and someone would begin singing a song; the hymn attributed to George Blaurock: "I cannot rely upon the flesh, for it is weak and sinful... I will build upon your Word, Lord, for it is my staff and shield... With all my heart I plead with you, forgive all my sins, and also, dearest Lord, forgive the sins of our enemies."

At a respectful distance stood a group of local villagers, including Uli Steiner, who had hidden behind a bush. They saw how the Anabaptists took up their bundles again and started on their way. Uli had seen his wife for the last time.

And this is how the Swiss-Anabaptist exiles found their way to the Palatinate region in southwestern Germany and Alsace, along the Rhine River, and North America.

RESPONDING

Hymn of response

HWB 610 *On Jordan's stormy banks I stand*

Benediction - HWB 768