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Worship Resources for

# *Mission Sunday*

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## **Introduction**

These worship resources are designed to assist you in planning for worship on Mission Sunday. The focus of this special Sunday is on the mission of church, a mission to which all are called, all are equipped and all are sent. We hope that the whole family of God will understand that God is at work, setting things right in a broken world, redeeming and restoring all things in Christ to God's intended design.

This particular worship resource has been prepared by Philip Bender, Mennonite Church Canada Witness worker in Chongqing, Peoples Republic of China, who hopes that this resource might assist our congregations worship in ways that help us align our being and doing with the work of God.

**Theme:** Silent growth, provocative witness

**Scripture Texts:** Genesis 12:1-3, Ezekiel 17:22-23; Psalm 67; Luke 13:18-21; 1 Peter 3:13-16

**Suggested Hymns:**

From *Hymnal Worship Book (HWB)*

90 – *For the fruit of all creation*  
224 – *You are salt for the earth*  
226 – *The Kingdom of God*  
278 – *Christ is alive! Let Christians sing!*  
322 – *For we are strangers no more*  
323 – *Beyond a dying sun*  
367 – *For the healing of the nations*  
396 – *The work is thine, O Christ*  
397 – *God loves all his many people*  
398 – *I love to tell the story'*  
400 – *Santo, Santo, Santo*  
401 – *This little light is mine*  
402 – *Christian let your burning light*  
433 – *Go, my children*

From *Sing the Journey (STJ)*

63 – *Lord, you gave the great commission*

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

### **Invocation**

Wonderful God, so indiscriminate is your love, so heedless of color and nationality and class, falling like sun and rain on all your children, the righteous and the unrighteous, the just and the unjust. For your lavish, gracious care we give you thanks and praise. Come now and sow in our hearts the seed of your word.

Come and knead into our spirit the leaven of your Spirit. And may your seed and leaven transform our words and deeds, so that others might come to know your love, and give you praise. Through Jesus Christ our Lord and friend. Amen.

### **Call to Worship (based on Ps. 67)**

L: God has been gracious to us, God has blessed us,

*P: God has made his face to shine upon us.*

L: God reveals his way to all peoples,

*P: God guides all the nations on the earth.*

L: God judges everyone with equity.

*P: God shows his saving power everywhere.*

L: Let all the nations praise you, O God,

*P: Let us, your people, praise you.*

### **Prayer of Confession**

Lord Jesus Christ, you have been the faithful sower, scattering seeds of God's love and grace in our lives.

Yet we confess that our hearts have often been like hard soil, or shallow soil, or thorny soil, stunting the seed and failing to bear fruit.

We also confess that we often have neglected our task of sowing the good news of your Kingdom, and of leavening the lives of others with your love.

Forgive us, and renew us, so that we might grow more in our faith and bear the fruit of your mercy, of your love, of your undying life. Amen.

### **Benediction**

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. —Ephesians 3:20-21

### **Children's Time**

Invite and welcome the children to this special time of the worship service where we try to apply the worship theme to their lives. Encourage them to settle their bodies and their hearts so that they notice and are thankful for the nearness of God. Open your Bible to Luke 13 and show it to the children. Say, "Today's scripture reading invites us to do something creative with seeds or yeast." Then follow one of the following object lesson suggestions:

1. Pass out small seeds—mustard, sesame, etc. Let the children feel them and describe them. Invite them to wonder what happens when these seeds are put into the ground, and what could ever grow from such a small seed. Then bring out a large plant or fruit to illustrate the contrast between small beginnings and great results. Apply to life. What seeds can we sow in our lives that will produce a large plant or fruit (a kind word or act, friendship, etc.)? What fruit will grow in us when we plant the seed of trust in Jesus? Have an extra quantity of seeds in enough small dishes for each row of worshipers, and invite the children to distribute them to the congregation.
2. Bring a bowl of warm sugar water, yeast and some flour. Let children feel, taste, and describe the yeast. Whatever can come of it? Put the yeast in the water and watch it bubble and fizz. What is happening? What will happen when the yeast mixture is put into flour? (Consider actually mixing the yeast with the flour and doing some kneading.) Apply to life. What happens to us when Jesus comes into our lives? How does Jesus “knead” us? What happens when people who love Jesus mix with other people in the world?

### Prayer:

Thank you, God, that your word grows in us like a seed/yeast and can grow into a big and beautiful plant/fluffy, delicious loaf of bread. Amen.

### Sermon seeds

1. God has a mission—not just saving souls, but bringing peace, salvation and blessing to the world. God points us toward the *world*, not just to our own ethnic group, nation or social class. Abram and his family are called not to just enjoy God’s blessing, but to be a universal channel of blessing (Gen. 12:1-3). That is the good news! Ezekiel restates this theme when he envisions a tree growing from the faithful remnant of Israel that will shelter *every* bird of the air. Jesus declared that this final, universal Kingdom has begun to break into history, and challenged people to see and become part of it. And Christians look forward to a new, transformed heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1). This is where history under God is moving. The mission of the church, through word and deed, is to declare and foreshadow the reconciled, transformed *creation* that God is bringing.
2. Mission is democratic and egalitarian. It is not elitist or specialist. It is not the monopoly of church growth experts, professional missionaries, service workers or missions committees. Mission is done by the whole people of God (Gen. 12:1-3), through the seeds and leaven of their words and deeds.
3. God already is at work among nations and peoples (Psalm 67, parables of seed and yeast), giving evidence of his will, salvation and judgment. The challenge of mission is discerning where and how God’s Spirit is working in a particular time and place to bring peace and blessing, and cooperating with it. Words are important to name what God is doing. Deeds are important to contribute to God’s work.
4. Jesus’ parables of seed and leaven are instructive for thinking about the church’s mission.
  - a. Like tiny seeds and household yeast, mission is often ordinary, mundane, humble, undistinguished, unspectacular. It utilizes persons and ideas that may not appear to be “missionary.”
  - b. Mission may seem weak and unpromising. Mustard seeds and leaven are ridiculously small. Whatever can come from them? Some of our efforts to witness to God’s coming Kingdom may seem like an exercise in scattering tiny, powerless seeds into inhospitable soil, or mixing insubstantial leaven into dense, impenetrable flour. But from unpromising beginnings God reaps a great harvest.

c. Mission subverts common ideas of greatness, desirability, and success. Jesus' hearers would have considered the mustard plant, at best, to be a managed weed. Like crab grass or dandelions, it was not a desirable plant for farmers, because it would grow fast and take over the field. Likening God's Kingdom to the great cedars of Lebanon would have seemed more sensible. After all, "mighty oaks from little acorns grow." Perhaps to mock and deflate such common ideas of greatness, desirability and success, Jesus makes a noxious weed—not a cedar or an oak—a symbol of God's Kingdom. Could it be that our most faithful "mission projects" look more like unproductive mustard plants, dandelions, and crab grass than towering trees? Yet in God's Kingdom, crab grass may be among the most distinguished plants, and may yield the most fruitful and faithful harvest.

d. Mission, like yeast, is quietly provocative and transformative. Silently but steadily, it penetrates its surroundings. It is countercultural. Mission prompts people to ask, "Who are you? What are you doing? Who is your Lord? What is this hope in you?" (1 Peter 3:13-16). Sometimes the witness of God's people is angrily or fearfully resisted (eg. workers and projects for peace and justice, individuals trying to work with integrity in a corrupting job, etc.) Sometimes witness to Christ evokes wonder, admiration, attraction. The early church historian Tertullian reported that even critics of the early church observed, "See how they love each other!" Expect faithful, visible Christian witness, especially when it involves suffering, to provoke onlookers to inquire into its source and rationale.

e. Mission is done in hope. The farmer who sows seed, the baker who kneads leaven, must wait patiently for results. They must give up control. At the beginning, the outcome of their project may seem uncertain, unpromising, precarious. But the end result—large plants and many loaves—exceeds expectations. Today we join with God in sowing seeds of a new heaven and earth, and look ahead, in hope, to the harvest of a new creation. And sometimes we even get a glimpse of that new creation when our mission projects bear fruit.

### For reflection:

- To what extent are we spectators or actors in God's mission?
- How much faith do we have to believe that God is working out his will in our world, in spite of its evils, and that our efforts to align our work with God's are meaningful?
- What ordinary, mundane words and deeds in our congregation can be called "missional"?
- What would it look like in our increasingly post-modern, post-Christendom culture, where Christians feel themselves to be more and more alien, for our church to have a provocative witness?
- Where do we see the seeds and leaven of God's Kingdom penetrating our surroundings and already yielding fruit?
- "Missional is the adjective used to define the character of a church that understands its purpose in light of God's invitation to participate in aligning all human activity with the intentions of God." – Robert J. Suderman
- "Christian spirituality is aligning the human spirit with the spirit of God. Christian mission is aligning the human task with the task of God." –Robert J. Suderman
- "Why does a church planted in one area grow while another does not? The pastors of growing churches often like to imagine that they are doing something better than the churches that are struggling, but is that really true? Does a church planted using one set of strategies grow because of those strategies? If so, then why doesn't the same set of strategies work universally? The answer is that it is not the strategies and it is not the pastor. The kingdom grows in sometimes unusual ways and under rather odd circumstances. . . [I]t might just be that the most profound kingdom growth isn't even in a church. It could be in an educational ministry, a feeding program, or a medical ministry. God works in mysterious ways, and the growth of the kingdom really is like the seed that the farmer put on the ground in the parable. It grows, and we don't know exactly what caused the growth. All we can do is rejoice in it." (Tod O.L. Mundo, *The Saturday Night Theologian*)