

# Worship Service

BY DAVID G. MILLER

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## *Silent Meditation*

If there is a God, he is infinitely beyond our comprehension, since, being indivisible and without limits, he bears no relation to us. We are therefore incapable of knowing either what he is or whether he is.

...[Y]ou must wager. There is no choice, you are already committed. Which will you choose then?... Let us assess the two cases: if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose nothing. Do not hesitate then; wager that he does exist.

*Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)*<sup>1</sup>

The reason Pascal's wager does not work is the same reason why you should never plan your retirement on winning the lotto.

*Massimo Pigliucci*<sup>2</sup>

## *Prelude*

## *The Summons*

God, whose mercy is wide,  
whose grace is sure,  
whose loving-kindness never fails,  
have mercy upon us.

**Christ, who risked love in this wicked world,  
who threw his lot in with slackers and sinners,  
who gave us all the chance of redemption,  
have mercy upon us.**

God, whose giving knows no ending,  
our security, our safety, our sanctuary,  
**grant us your peace. Amen.**

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## *Processional Hymn*

“God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending”

God, whose giving knows no ending,  
from your rich and endless store —  
nature’s wonder, Jesus’ wisdom,  
costly cross, grave’s shattered door —  
gifted by you, we turn to you,  
offering up ourselves in praise;  
thankful song shall rise forever,  
gracious Donor of our days.

Skills and time are ours for pressing  
toward the goals of Christ, your Son:  
all at peace in health and freedom,  
races joined, the Church made one.  
Now direct our daily labor,  
lest we strive for self alone.  
Born with talents, make us servants  
fit to answer at your throne.

Treasure, too, you have entrusted,  
gain through powers your grace conferred,  
ours to use for home and kindred,  
and to spread the gospel word.  
Open wide our hands in sharing,  
as we heed Christ’s ageless call,  
healing, teaching, and reclaiming,  
serving you by loving all.

*Robert L. Edwards (1961)*<sup>3</sup>

*Tune: BEECH SPRING*

## *Morning Collect (Unison)*

God, we acknowledge your gracious hand in all our lives, your generous gifts of grace by which we live. In this hour, help us to rest secure in the knowledge of your love for us and help us to worship you with our bodies, minds, and spirits. We know that all we have comes from you.

God, we recognize your glorious image in our neighbors, your gracious community with whom we live. In this hour, help us to renew our commitment to love this world the way you love it and help us to use our resources, granted by you, to relieve want, to ease suffering, and to meet the needs of those around us. In doing this, help us to fulfill your great desires, through Jesus your son our savior, we pray. Amen.

*The Witness of the Old Testament: Genesis 18:1, 23-33*

The word of the Lord for God's people.  
**Thanks be to God.**

*Prayer of Confession*

Assured of God's love and mercy towards us, we turn to God – not to win God's favor, but rather to rest in God's most sure grace and receive relief and redemption in our time of need. Let us confess our sins before a loving and gracious God:

**God, we confess before you now that we are people who would rather gamble on works than rest on grace, that we are willing to risk our lives to control a random game, that we want to win, win, win, and that means spending all we have on the hope of a jackpot. We have our eyes on the possible pay off and not on the present reality. Often, we choose to be duped rather than delivered; we choose to be thrilled, instead of being thankful; we would rather bet on luck than work to be better people. We hope in the next hand dealt.**

**Forgive our foolish ways. Forgive us for believing that money will solve our problem, for thinking that excitement will cure our prodigal ways. In your generosity you gift us with the world and we chance it all for something far less real. God, satisfy us with yourself in whom we rest secure. You have risked everything to win us back. In the light of that love, help us to make good. Amen.**

God in grace has dealt out forgiveness to us through Jesus Christ, our savior and lord. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, live lives free from the burdens of sin, rejoice in your redemption, and love God with your whole being while loving others as yourself.

**Amen.**

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## *Prayers of the People*

Continuing in our prayers, let us offer to God our petitions and intercessions, saying “Lord in your mercy...hear our prayer.”

*(The congregants may offer short prayers for situations or individuals. Each ends with “Lord in your mercy” to which the rest of the congregation responds, “hear our prayer.”)*

God, hear the prayers we have made before you, believing that you invite us to join with you in the risky love of this world. Where possible, help us through the power of your Holy Spirit to be the sure answers to the prayers we have made. Where we cannot work, help us to see your loving hand at work, touching these lives with your presence.

**Amen.**

## *The Witness of the New Testament: 1 Timothy 6:6-12*

The word of the Lord for God’s people  
**Thanks be to God.**

## *Hymn of Preparation*

“We Give Thee but Thine Own”

We give thee but thine own,  
whate’er the gift may be;  
all that we have is thine alone,  
a trust, O Lord, from thee.

May we thy bounties thus  
as stewards true receive,  
and gladly, as thou blessest us,  
to thee our first-fruits give.

O! hearts are bruised and dead,  
and homes are bare and cold,  
and lambs for whom the shepherd bled  
are straying from the fold.

To comfort and to bless,  
to find a balm for woe,  
to tend the lone and fatherless  
is angels' work below.

The captive to release,  
to God the lost to bring,  
to teach the way of life and peace —  
it is a Christ-like thing.

And we believe thy word,  
though dim our faith may be;  
whate'er for thine we do, O Lord,  
we do it unto thee.

*William W. How* (1858)  
*Tune: CANTICA LAUDIS*

*The Witness of the Gospels: Matthew 25:14-30*

The gospel of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

*Sermon: "Gambling on Grace"*<sup>4</sup>

*Hymn of Response*

"Self-sufficient! Is the Cry"

"Self-sufficient!" is the cry  
of those who've carved their gods.  
They test, in hope of giant leaps,  
the god of calculated odds.

Their god moves in lucky leaps,  
or does not move at all;  
no daily walk in steps of faith,  
no pilgrimage, no guide or call.

Our creator's wealth and love  
are endless, and to share.  
The Son is present in our need;  
the Holy Spirit's always there.

“Lord have mercy,” is the cry  
of those whose God is Christ.  
He teaches us to lose is gain,  
the One Sufficient, sacrificed.

*Terry W. York, ASCAP (2011)*  
*Tune: CHANCE*  
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(pp. 55-57 of this volume)

### *Presentations of Tithes and Offerings*

Of your hand, O Lord, we have received,  
**and of your own we have given thee. Amen.**

### *Doxology*

O God, who won our hearts in love  
by sending grace down from above,  
help us in joys, secure and true,  
to risk our lives to worship you. Amen.

*David G. Miller (2011)*  
*Tune: OLD 100<sup>th</sup>*

### *The Departure*

We journey through this life not gambling that God exists, but knowing  
God's abiding presence.

**We journey through this life not betting that God is good, but living  
in God's abundant blessing.**

We journey through this life not playing the odds that God loves us, but  
resting in God's constant care.

**We stand secure, and in standing we can live lives of winsome love,  
offering ourselves in the sure and certain hope that God is able to  
do even more that we might ask or think. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

### *Postlude*

## *Sentence for Meditation This Week*

Quantum mechanics is certainly imposing. But an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing. The theory says a lot, but does not really bring us any closer to the 'old one.' I, at any rate, am convinced that *He* [God] is not playing at dice.

*Albert Einstein* (1879-1955)<sup>5</sup>

In every bet there is a fool and a thief.

*Traditional Proverb*

## **NOTES**

1 Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, § 418, translated by A. J. Krailsheimer (New York, Penguin Books, 1995 [1966]), 122-123.

2 Massimo Pigliucci, "A Refutation of Pacal's Wager and Why Skeptics Should be Non-theists," available online at [http://freethoughtfirefighters.org/a\\_refutation\\_of\\_pascals\\_wager\\_Massimo\\_Pigliucci.htm](http://freethoughtfirefighters.org/a_refutation_of_pascals_wager_Massimo_Pigliucci.htm), accessed May 23, 2011.

3 Robert L. Edwards, "God Whose Giving Knows No Ending," © 1961, Ren. 1989 The Hymn Society (Admin. Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188). All rights reserved. Used by permission.

4 The sermon explores God's economy of grace and generosity, which is at odds with our culture's economy of risk and scarcity. In Abraham's bargaining with God, we glimpse God's willingness to be merciful even for one. The instruction to Timothy clarifies how God's new kingdom, where the currency is righteousness, overturns the values in a money-based economy. In Jesus' difficult parable, the third servant's attitude expresses what many people think of God: they project their own grasping and hoarding onto God's character. Nothing in the parable supports the third servant's accusations about his master, but his own fear creates the very world that he dreads—where those who have will get more and those who have nothing will lose everything. The vicious cycle of a system in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer is all too clear in this parable.

5 Albert Einstein, Letter to Max Born on December 4, 1926, in Max Born, *The Born-Einstein Letters: Friendship, Politics and Physics in Uncertain Times, 1916-1955*, translated by Irene Born (New York: Macmillan, 2005 [1971]), 88.

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**DAVID G. MILLER**

*is Associate Professor of English at Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi.*