

Worship Service

BY JEANIE MILEY

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 95:1-7)¹

O come, let us sing to the Most High Creator of the Cosmos;
let us make a joyful song to the Beloved!

Let us come to the Radiant One with thanksgiving,
with gratitude let us offer our psalms of praise!

For the Beloved is Infinite, the Breathing Life of all.

The depths of the earth belong to Love;

the height of the mountains, as well.

The sea and all that is in it,

the dry land and air above were created by Love.

O come, let us bow down and give thanks,

let us be humble before the Blessed One!

For the Beloved is Supreme, and

we, blessed to be invited to friendship

as companions along the Way!

Chiming of the Hour and Silent Meditation

Human beings, we are told, carry within themselves a very great possibility, and corresponding to this possibility, a great obligation. We have the possibility of opening ourselves to a quality of life and consciousness that transcends anything we ordinarily experience as happiness or knowledge or meaning.

*Jacob Needleman*²

Invocation

Loving God, we do not so much invoke your presence
as we remind ourselves that we are always in your presence,
and that it is you who has called to us.

We do not presume to ask you to be with us,
for there is nowhere we can go where you are not.

You are Emmanuel, God-with us,

loving us toward you and toward each other.

So, we turn our hearts and minds toward you.

We attune our attention and our wills with yours, by your grace.

We come to you because you have come to us.

We love you because you have first loved us.

Hymn of Praise

“All Creatures of Our God and King”

All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluia, Alleluia!

O burning sun with golden beam,
and silver moon with softer gleam,
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

O rushing wind that art so strong,
you clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, Alleluia!
O rising morn in praise rejoice,
O lights of evening, find a voice,
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

O flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for your Lord to hear,
Alleluia, Alleluia!
O fire so masterful and bright,
providing us with warmth and light,
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

All you who are of tender heart,
forgiving others, take your part,
sing praises, Alleluia!
All you who pain and sorrow bear,
praise God and on him cast your care,
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Let all things their Creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son
and praise the Spirit, Three in One,

*O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226); tr. William H. Draper (1855-1933), alt.
Tune: LASST UNS ERFREUEN*

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

...[T]hen the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

A Reading from the Psalms (from Psalm 8:4-7)³

What is woman, that You rejoice in her,
And man, that You delight in him?
You have made us in your image,
You fill us with your Love;
You have made us co-creators of the earth!
guardians of the planet!

A Gospel Reading (Matthew 28:1-10)

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

A man speaks:

We may wonder why it was that Jesus chose Mary Magdalene to carry the good news of the resurrection to his disciples.

In her, perhaps Jesus saw the blending of strengths: the strengths of openness, receptivity, and the willingness to be a cooperative and pliable witness of the Mystery, and the strengths of courage, boldness, and action.

These very strengths are the hallmarks of discipleship, and all are qualities that reside in each of us – man, woman, boy or girl.

Blended, balanced, manifested in the appropriate measure, a man or a woman expresses more fully the image of God.

A Gospel Reading (John 20:18)

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

A woman speaks:

In Mary Magdalene’s declaration “I have seen the Lord” to Jesus’ disciples, she proclaimed a recognition of one whose life and work had the power to heal, transform, liberate and empower her – one worthy to be called Lord.

With him and with his teaching, Mary had seen Jesus’ greatness and an uncommon strength that was gentle enough to provide the safe container in which she could become all that she was created to become.

In his humanity then and in his lordship now, the Living Christ shows us power, strength, boldness, and forcefulness, and in him we see tenderness, openness, and warmth.

In the human Jesus, we see the perfect balance of both masculine and feminine strengths, strengths that call us to become more fully human, more completely creative and productive, and more loving as we learn how to balance all the qualities God inscribed within each person, made in his image.

In Jesus, we see the way to move creatively back and forth, using the masculine or feminine strength that is called for in the moment.

A Gospel Reading: John 15:9-18

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

The Written Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God for the written word.

Thanks be to God for the Living Word.

Hymn of Preparation

“Pilgrims on this Earthly Journey”

Pilgrims on this earthly journey,
gifted all with dignity,
in God’s image we are fashioned
to be joined in unity.

Blessed by gifts of one another,
man and woman, boy and girl,
we are made to help each other
grow toward wholeness in the world.

Every man, though each one different,
wears the sacred stamp of God;
every woman, each distinctive,
bears in her the life of God.

Celebrate each person’s purpose,
bringing forth God’s great design.
Praise the love that flows among us,
partners, colleagues, friends through time.

Brothers, sisters, in God’s image,
let us give each other grace;
let us learn from one another
in this holy worship space.

Jeanie Miley (2013)

Tune: WEBSTER (Bolin) (p. 67 in this volume)

Sermon

Confession

God of creation, we know that we are made in your image, male and female.
Yet, too often we have failed to honor the dignity of one another.

Lord, have mercy on us.

We have confined ourselves by holding one another to small roles and identities, based on gender.

We have disrespected one other; we have labeled and treated one another as stereotypes.

Lord, have mercy on us.

We have valued one gender over another, either by cultural conditioning, bias, or prejudice. We have sinned against each other by carelessness, ignorance, or willful intent.

We have turned blind eyes to the abuse, the slander, the flippant insult, or the blatant disdain of one gender by the other.

Lord, have mercy on us.

We have not honored the mystery of those who are different from us. We have closed our minds and our hearts to one another.

We have used one another for personal gain. We have punished one another for not fulfilling our expectations.

We have tried to change and control one another. Instead of loving one another, we have feared one another.

Lord, have mercy on us.

We acknowledge that where love is lacking, power and control rule; and where power and control rule, love dies.

Forgive us and help us, Lord, we pray.

Pastoral Absolution

May the God who created each of you
have mercy on you and forgive you of your sins.

May God heal the separations between you
and restore the fragmented, alienated parts of your lives.

May the God of love who made you in his image
grant you pardon and give you deep peace and love for each other.

Silent Reflection

The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.

*Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV 1984)*⁴

Songs of Grace

“Can You Hear It?” / “Holy, Holy, God of Power”⁵

Can you hear it? It’s a love song.
Can you hear it, God’s love song?
In the silence you will hear it,
in your heart you’ll know the song.
It’s a love song, God’s great love song.
It’s a love song, God’s great love.

Holy, holy, God of power,
full of mercy, full of grace;
God transcendent, present with us,
holy God.

Men and women, elders, children,
infants tender, people wise,
in the loving of each other,
God with us.

Brothers, sisters, sing together,
it’s a love song for all time.
Sweet and tender, fierce and sturdy,
God is love.

Can you hear it? It’s a love song.
Can you hear it, God’s love song?
In the silence you will hear it.
Won’t you come and sing along?
It’s a grace song, God’s great love song.
It’s a love song, God’s great love.

Jeanie Miley (2013)

Tunes: CAN YOU HEAR IT/HOLY, HOLY, GOD OF POWER
(pp. 68-69 in this volume)

Benediction

Go from this place, knowing that you are created in the image of God.

Go, looking into the eyes of each other, seeing each other for who you are: each one made in the image of God.

Go as precious people, beloved by God, giving grace and love to each other as instruments of God's peace and blessing in the world.

Go now, in the grace of God.

NOTES

1 Nan C. Merrill, *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2007), 188-189. Used by permission.

2 Jacob Needleman, *A Little Book on Love* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 11. Quoted in Jeanie Miley, *Joining Forces: Balancing Masculine and Feminine* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2008), 9.

3 Merrill, *Psalms for Praying*, 10. Used by permission.

4 Scripture from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

5 I suggest that a solo voice or children's choir sing the first verse of "Can You Hear It?" Then for "Holy, Holy, God of Power," men and women sing the first verse, men alone sing the second verse, and women alone sing the third verse. Children and adults join together to sing the final verse of "Can You Hear It?"



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