

Worship Service

BY ELIZABETH SANDS WISE

Prelude

“We Are One in the Spirit” (acoustic guitar)¹

Call to Worship

Because we are one in the spirit,

we gather.

Because we are one in the Lord,

we gather.

Because we have been called to one another, to this community,

we gather.

Come, let us worship together.

Amen.

Congregational Hymn

“Let Us Bear Each Other’s Burdens”

Let us bear each other’s burdens
as we struggle on through life;
turn not on the erring members,
add not to their care and strife;
let our hearts beat kindly for them,
for this world with sin is rife.

If their burdens be so heavy
that they stoop beneath the care,
let us bear them, of our vigor,
help them as we well can spare.

Wipe away the tears of sorrow
falling from their weary eyes;
point them to a joy eternal
in the land beyond the skies,
ere their pining heart in anguish,
bitter, hopeless anguish, dies.
Sympathy and love can brighten
burdens that are hard to bear;
angels bright will help us nobly,
angels from the land so fair.

Wrap not close our mantles 'round us —
mantles dark, of selfish pride;
in our bosoms, gentle impulse
we'll not strive to crush or hide.
There's so much of good and evil
in this world so broad and wide,
much for willing hearts to shoulder,
much of good there is to do.
Then arise! Leave not the burden
bearing heavy on the few.

J. Van Namee (1881), alt.

Tune: ALL THE WAY

Community Prayer

O God, who hovered over the darkness
like a mother bird flutters her wings over her nest,
hover over us now and create something from nothing.

From our darkness of sickness, mourning, and disease,
from our worries about our communities and loved ones and finances
and futures and the myriad anxieties that cling to us,
from the incomprehensible tragedies of the world that make us wail and
tear our clothes and, sometimes, pray —

from even these darkneses,
create wholeness and healing, peace and rest
this morning, this Sabbath, as we gather together,
that we might look around us and still see your creative handiwork
and know that it is good.

O God of this community, have mercy upon us.

O God, who cried over Jerusalem,
who knelt to wash dusty, unclean feet,
who spit in the dirt when mud was what the blind man needed;

O God, who tells stories,
redeem our tears,
our unwillingness to kneel,
our hands caked with our own mud,
our obsession with our own stories, our own problems.

Teach us to be a community who cries together,
kneels together,
gets dirty together,
and tells your story together.

O God of this community, have mercy upon us.

O God, who came to comfort,
anticipating the pain of life in this world,
groan for us and with us.

We groan for those in the pews of this faith community
and for those on the streets of our physical community.

We groan for both the powerful and the powerless in our country,
for both the warlords and the war victims abroad;
for the invisible network of human traffickers
and for human slaves who make our lives possible;
and also for those who place themselves in danger
to work for peace and justice every day,
in every country, in every community.

Show us how we are most needed.
Teach us to be comforters,
to bear one another's burdens and the world's burdens
from our own safe homes,
and to pray without words
when the words of this world are simply inadequate.

**O God of this community, have mercy upon us.
Teach us to be community. Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Romans 12 and Matthew 5:1-11²

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

After he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: Blessed.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,

Blessed.

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

Blessed are

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit,

Blessed are the meek,

serve the Lord.

for they will inherit the earth.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Blessed are those who hunger

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

for they will be filled.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;

Blessed are the pure in heart,

do not claim to be wiser than you are.

for they will see God.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

Blessed are the peacemakers,

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

for they will be called children of God.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.'

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Blessed are you.

Discipline of Silence

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.

*Wendell Berry*³

Unison Prayer of Confession

Creator God,

we confess that we have not loved the poor in spirit,
the meek,
the peacemakers,
and those seeking justice among us.

Sometimes we have not even noticed them.

Forgive us.

Redeemer God,

we confess that we have not offered our gifts to our community;
we have conformed to the world,
and not loved what is good or hated what is evil.

Sometimes we have not loved at all.

Forgive us.

Sustainer God,

we confess that we do not know how to be members of a community;
we do not know how to overcome evil with good,
how to love our enemies,
how to be children of God.

Sometimes we do not want to be members of a community.

Forgive us.

Congregational Hymn

“One in Jesus”

Come, Lord, heal my narrow vision:
fearful, selfish, dim and weak.
Never can I find salvation
when it's by myself I seek.

*We are made to be one in Jesus,
made one body by his blood;
formed and found in his communion,
most ourselves when lost in love.*

Come, Lord, steal our greed-sick vision:
make us one with rich and poor.
By your grace reform our strivings –
loosed from things, we'll love you more.

Refrain.

Lord forgive our fearful vision,
set our captive, scarred hearts free.
Bind and heal us in shared worship
of the holy One who's Three.

Refrain.

Bid us come, Lord, to your banquet,
there to feast forevermore!
Members of God's heavenly chorus,
with one voice we all adore.

Refrain.

Jonathan Sands Wise (2014)

Tune: RESTORATION

Offertory

"We Are One in the Spirit" (solo or small group vocals)¹

Testimony of Community⁴

Sermon

Response: A Prayer for Unity

O Trinity,
our God who is yourself Community,
who created us in your image,
teach us how to be united under the banner of your love.
Teach us how to walk in faith to love and serve you,
to love and serve one another.
Open our eyes and our hearts to see the needs of those
sitting beside us in the pew,
crossing the street in front of us,
sitting beside us in cubicles and classrooms.
And when we feel our temperatures rising,
our tempers flaring,
our compassion fading,
give us the courage to turn to you,
to ask for your grace, your patience, your love.
Remind us of your image in us,
and draw us to one another. Amen.

Communion

Congregational Hymn

“United by God’s Grace”

Come now brothers, come now sisters, when will we cease to pretend,
quit this myth of independence, and God’s teaching understand?
We are all, whate’er our function, members of one holy host,
in one God, all are united, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Can the hand say to the liver, or the eye say to the foot:
“What can you require of me? Why must I give help to you?”
Oh, how foolishly we struggle to live lonely lives of worth!
Only when we’re all united can God’s work be done on earth.

And one day when we’re in Glory, greeting each incoming soul,
sharing in the joy God gives us, knowing each adds to the whole,
then we’ll grasp what we see dimly in our current, muddled state:
we’re ourselves when we’re united, bound together by God’s grace.

Jonathan Sands Wise (2014)

Tune: PLEADING SAVIOR

Benediction

May the peace of our creating, redeeming, sustaining God
go with each of us now
as we go together
into the parking lot, the streets, the community, the world—
members of one another,
known for our love.

NOTES

1 Peter Scholtes’s text “We Are One in the Spirit” and tune ST. BRENDANS are copyrighted © 1966 by F. E. L. Publications, and now assigned to The Lorenz Corporation, 1991.

2 Pairing these well-known scripture passages allows us to see them, and our communities, in a new light: both our faith communities and our broader communities are places of healthy dependence—indeed, we are all dependent on one another—as well as the places where the gifts we each have to offer are given freely and without judgment. Though the passages are intended to be read by two unique voices (a man and a woman, a young person and an older person, two persons of differing nationalities or native tongues), the passages can also be read responsively, with the congregation reading the lines of bold print.

3 Wendell Berry, "The Loss of the Future," in *The Long-Legged House* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012 [1969]), 53-74, here citing 71.

4 Every congregation has key stories in its communal memory that define its community and what has been important to its members through the years. Often, those stories come amidst great tragedy and trial—a terminal diagnosis of a young member, for example, the death of a beloved deacon, or local or national tragedies. But joyous moments also color communal memories: weddings and baptisms, births and adoptions, new buildings and ministries, personal and church anniversaries. Indeed, both sad and happy occasions have the potential to draw members of a community out of themselves; they help members discover anew what it means to be a community because they provide opportunities for them to serve one another as Christ served his disciples. Therefore, memories of such occasions are essential to what it means to be a church.

Before the service begins, ask three or four (or more) members of the community if they would be willing to share what they consider to be some of these significant "moments" in the congregation's history and in their personal experiences as members of the community. Also, before concluding, ask others who are present if they would like to offer similar testimonies of when the church was "community" to them.



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