

Worship Service

BY JULIE MERRITT LEE

Prelude

(A child lights a candle as a symbol of God's presence.)

Call to Worship

Come all who have gathered,
to **taste and see that God is good,**
to trust and hope in the Holy One:
 the Holy Creator,
 the Holy Redeemer,
 the Holy Midwife in our midst.
Because of you, O God, we are not consumed,
 your compassions never fail.
They are new every morning.
 Great is your faithfulness.

Chiming of the Hour

Introit Hymn

"The Sacred Now"

We begin this day in stillness,
we are here, and it is now:
sacred time in which we've gathered.
Casting cares, we bend and bow.
God of wisdom, God of nurture,
hem us in before, behind.
Hollow out the space inside us;
fill us with pure love divine.

Shapeless void to form and beauty,
in your image, we are made:
breathing, living, moving, striving.
Light of lights, our hearts invade.
For we lay our fears before you,
Love whose power can set us free.
Birth in us the gift of presence;
birth in us eternity.

In this sacred space together,
we are bound and yet we're free:
free to dream and free to cherish
Love that's borne of Trinity.
Bring to us your consolation;
mercies new this day begin.
We remember you have found us;
on this day, we're born again.

Julie Merritt Lee (2009)
Tune: HYFRYDOL
(pp. 65-67 of this volume)

Silent Meditation

Let nothing trouble you;
let nothing make you afraid.
All things pass away;
God never changes.
Patience obtains everything.
God alone is enough.

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Unison Prayer of Confession¹

Holy and merciful One, we confess:
that you are God and we are not,
that you are infinite and we are limited,
that you are immortal and we are human,
that you are wholeness and we are broken,
that you are our source and we are in need.

(silent prayers of confession)

Hear our prayer today and throughout this week.
We pray through Christ, whom we follow. Amen.

Psalm Reading: Psalm 48:9-14

We ponder your steadfast love, O God,
in the midst of your temple.
Your name, O God, like your praise,
reaches to the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with victory.
Let Mount Zion be glad,
let the towns of Judah rejoice
because of your judgments.

Walk about Zion, go all around it,
count its towers,
consider well its ramparts;
go through its citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
He will be our guide forever.

Hymn of Response

“Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” (verses 1, 2, and 4)

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy pow’rful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
bear me through the swelling current,
Land me safe on Canaan’s side;

Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams (1745); translated from Welsh to English by Peter Williams (1771), alt.

Tune: CWM RHONDDA

The Prayers of God's People²

For all women called to visionary clarity...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer.**

For all women who nurture the faith of their sisters...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer.**

For all women who speak truth to power...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer.**

For all women who write words of wisdom, beauty, and life...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer.**

For all women gifted with melodies and song...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer.**

For all women who heal...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer.**

For all women who cherish creation and discern in it the ways of the Creator...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer.**

For all women whose names and lives are forgotten...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer.**

For each of us here and for all those we have brought into the circle with us...
(*after silent or spoken petitions*) **hear our prayer. Amen.**

Offering

New Testament Reading: John 16:21

When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 1:8-22

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

The Word of the Lord for God's people.

Thanks be to God.

*Sermon**Silent Reflection*³

There is no other way: I will have to learn to practice midwifery crouched amidst heaps of rubble.

I pledge allegiance to this vision of the divine presence
and to the vision of the world for which it stands
one world
in which violence and fragmentation are real
yet in which God labors to bring forth life.
I am called to kneel beside Her
in Her labor.

Teresa Berger

Hymn of Commitment

“The Women’s Hymn”

Come, women, wide proclaim
life through your Savior slain;
sing evermore.
Christ, God’s effulgence bright,
Christ, who arose in might,
Christ, who crowns you with light,
praise and adore.

Come, clasping children’s hands,
sisters from many lands,
teach to adore.
For the sin sick and worn,
the weak and overborne,
all who in darkness mourn,
pray, work, yet more.

Work with your courage high,
sing of the daybreak nigh,
your love outpour.
Stars shall your brow adorn,
your heart leap with the morn,
and, by his love upborne,
hope and adore.

Then when the garnered field
shall to our Master yield
a bounteous store,
Christ, hope of all the meek,
Christ, whom all the earth shall seek,
Christ your reward shall speak,
joy evermore.

Fannie E. S. Heck (1913)
Tune: ITALIAN HYMN

Benediction

All shall be well
and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.

Julian of Norwich (c. 1342-c. 1416)

NOTES

1 Adapted from a prayer by Burt Burleson for DaySpring Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, February 25, 2004.

2 Teresa Berger, *Fragments of Real Presence: Liturgical Traditions in the Hands of Women* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 84-85. Used by permission.

3 *Ibid.*, 70. Used by permission.



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