
Worship Service

BY ANN BELL WORLEY

Prelude

Call to Worship: John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Processional Hymn:

“Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
 in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
 most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
 Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
 nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
 Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above
 Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, to both great and small;
 in all life Thou livest, the true life of all;
 we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
 and wither and perish—but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
 Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
 all praise we would render; O help us to see
 'tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee!

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908), alt.

Tune: ST. DENIO

Invocation:

O God, you have given us the breath to sing your praise,
you hold the power of life in your hand.
Keep us mindful of our creation in your image,
the privilege we share as co-creators with you,
and our responsibility as bearers of hope in an ever-changing world.
Awaken us to your presence, O God, that we might hear your voice
amid our shared reflections and the words we speak.
Give us wisdom and discernment to be faithful followers of Jesus,
who is the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.

Welcome to Worshipers:

None of us fully comprehends the science of cloning, much less knows the mind of God with regard to each new technology and capability. Yet we should consider the issues surrounding therapeutic and reproductive cloning in all of their complexity, with a keen eye toward the moral implications of human action and society's laws. We gather as a worshipping community to grapple with the challenging issues of cloning, bring our theological tradition to bear on public debate, and search not only for answers but also for understanding.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

"When a person fell, the work went on, but when a brick fell, all wept"
(*Midrash Rabbah*)¹

Meditation:

“Letter to Genetically Engineered Super Humans”²

You are the children of our fantasies of form,
our wish to carve a larger cave of light,
our dream to perfect the ladder of genes and climb

its rungs to the height of human possibility,
to a stellar efflorescence beyond all injury
and disease, with minds as bright as newborn suns

and bodies which leave our breathless mirrors stunned.
Forgive us if we failed to imagine your loneliness
in the midst of all that ordinary excellence,

if we failed to understand how much harder
it would be to build the bridge of love
between such splendid selves, to find the path

of humility among the labyrinth of your abilities,
to be refreshed without forgetfulness,
and weave community without the threads of need.

Forgive us if you must re-invent our flaws
because we failed to guess the simple fact
that the best lives must be less than perfect.

Fred Dings

Hymn:

“God Who Searches, God Who Knows”

Terry W. York

Tune: KAPIOLANI

(text and tune pp. 50-51 of this volume)

Faith Stories

(Invite two or three families with stories germane to cloning to write a one-page witness to their struggle and hope, to be shared in worship by a lay reader. Examples might include a couple’s journey through infertility, a

*young adult with terminal illness facing death, a family with a sick child
whose only avenue for medical help is through advances in stem-cell research.)*

Choral Anthem (Youth Choir):

“Psalm 139”³

Allen Pote (1992)

Prayers of the People:

In peace we pray to you, O God.

For our friends and neighbors for whom cloning is more than a disembodied issue, whose lives are touched with sorrow as they yearn for a child but cannot conceive, grieve the decline of a loved one, or face their own impending death, *(silent prayers)*

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For those who pursue new avenues for human life and health, and need wisdom to serve the common good through their work, *(silent prayers)*

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For those who set government policy with regard to human cloning and stem-cell research, who draw the line between what we *can* do and what we *should* do, *(silent prayers)*

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For those in desperate need of basic health care, who will rarely benefit from sophisticated medical technologies and whose voices are lost in debates about cloning, *(silent prayers)*

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For this faith community as we seek divine guidance on the matter of cloning—awareness of our place in your creation, compassion toward your world, justice in medical and financial ethics, humility in our convictions, and unity in our confession, *(silent prayers)*

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Passing of the Peace

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

*Sermon**Hymn:*

"If You Will Only Let God Guide You"

If you will only let God guide you,
and hope in Him through all your ways,
whatever comes, He'll stand beside you,
to bear you through the evil days.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
builds on the Rock that cannot move.

Only be still, and wait His leisure
in cheerful hope, with heart content
to take what'er the Father's pleasure
and all discerning love have sent;
nor doubt our inmost wants are known
to Him who chose us for His own.

Sing, pray, and swerve not from His ways,
but do your part in conscience true;
trust His rich promises of grace,
so shall they be fulfilled in you;
God hears the call of those in need,
the souls that trust in Him indeed.

Georg Neumark (1621-1681); tr. Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878), alt.
Tune: NEUMARK

Offering

(An offering is received to support a local ministry serving children who are underprivileged, have special needs, or are awaiting adoption.)

Benediction: The Lord's Prayer

Postlude

NOTES

1 This rabbinic midrash on Babel from *Midrash Rabbah* is cited by Laurie Zoloth, "Born Again: Faith and Yearning in the Cloning Controversy," in Paul Lauritzen, ed., *Cloning and the Future of Human Embryo Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 136.

2 Fred Dings, "Letter to Genetically Engineered Super Humans," *Poetry* 167 (March 1996), 333, and reprinted in the poet's *Eulogy for a Private Man* (TriQuarterly Books/Northwestern University Press, 1999). Used by permission.

3 *Psalm 139* (SATB, piano, CGA610) Words and Music: Allen Pote. Copyright © 1992 Choristers Guild (www.choristersguild.org).



ANN BELL WORLEY
is a freelance writer in Chicago, Illinois.