

Worship for Celebration of Ministry Sunday

Sunday, May 29, 2011, is the date of the Celebration of Ministry Service for Alberta and Northwest Conference. Since Ministry Personnel and Conference Delegates are invited to attend the service, President-Elect Sally Boyle has prepared this service for use in Congregations. Feel free to adapt this to suit your needs. For an electronic copy, please contact the Conference Office, kjackson@anwconf.com.

We Open Ourselves to the Spirit

I begin each week by inviting the congregation into a brief moment of silence in order to centre ourselves in the act of worship. We break the silence with a short refrain as offered here.

GATHERING MOMENT (No. 14 MV): “Where Two Or Three Are Gathered” (x3)

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Into your hands, oh God, we commend our spirit.

All: Breathe new life into our weary souls.

One: Into your hands, oh God, we commend our spirit.

All: Fill us with joyous hallelujahs.

One: Into your hands, oh God, we commend our spirit.

All: One spirit, one truth, one hope. May we, as one body, give thanks and enter into the Mystery which surrounds and fills us.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

We open our hearts to one another, and, in these moments of stillness, become aware of the warmth, the breath, the life we share. The spirit of Christ abides in the shared space between us. May we inhale deeply of this sacred presence, and exhale words and actions of godly love. Amen.

HYMN NO. 316 VU: “Praise Our Maker”

Because we are not always all that God calls us to be, I offer an opportunity each week for people to offer up to God and to each other some words of confession followed always by the assurance of God’s continued love and grace. You may choose to use this prayer or not in accordance with your tradition.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(Hold strands of ribbon while introducing this prayer time.)

We are joined together by Christ’s Spirit. Through this joining, we know Love, and we are able to speak, and act, and be love. These strands represent the Spirit that joins us together.

Aware of this Spirit around us, let us also be aware of the faith we share and the strain that is sometimes part of our reality.

May we hear the heart speak with a quiet voice inviting us to fulfill the commandment to love.
(silent prayer)

ASSURANCE OF GOD’S LOVE

(Place the ribbons on the floor throughout the sanctuary surrounding or connecting the gathered community.)

Spirit’s presence is in us, between us, and embracing us always. Through the unity of this Spirit, we are shaped into a community that lives to fulfill love’s expectations. Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

STORY TIME

Celebrate with the children the uniqueness and gift that the United Church brings to your community. How would the community be different without our presence?

HYMN NO. 157 MV: “I Am a Child of God”

We Engage the Spirit’s Presence

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 17: 22-28

Psalm 66: 8-20 page 785 VU, Parts Two and Three

Special Music

John14: 15-21

MEDITATION

HYMN NO. 142 MV: “Oh a Song Must Rise”

We Rejoice in the Spirit’s Presence

OFFERING

OFFERING HYMN NO. 182 MV: “Grateful” (refrain only)

OFFERTORY PRAYER

**May these Gifts be far more than their physical presence can command.
May they be an inspiration and a blessing given in love. Amen**

PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE

(Offer prayers of thanksgiving and intercession appropriate to your context)

HYMN NO. 372 VU: “Though I May Speak”

BENEDICTION

God is with us always, for where there is love, there is God.
Go and be the body of Christ; fulfill love’s expectation,
and the Spirit will be your advocate forever. Amen

RECESSIONAL HYMN NO. 156 MV: “Dance with the Spirit”

“I gratefully acknowledge the resource Seasons of the Spirit from which I have adapted much of what appears in this service.” -- Sally

The scripture readings and meditation follow.

Acts 17:22-28

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, ‘Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, “To an unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, The One who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is that God served by human hands, as though God needed anything, since it is God who gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for God and find God—though indeed God is not far from each one of us. For “In God we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are God’s offspring.”

John 14:15-21

‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask God, and God will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees that Spirit nor knows that Spirit. You know the Spirit, because it abides with you, and will be in you.

‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in God, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by God, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.’

Meditation

While we gather here today there is a gathering also in Hawrelak Park in Edmonton for the Celebration of Ministry Service for Alberta and Northwest Conference. We have this opportunity to celebrate in spirit with our sisters and brothers throughout this Conference and to remember that our ministry is a “piece of a whole”, one part of a great puzzle wherein we discern how best to serve the mission of God in our area.

As is almost always the case the scriptures offer us both challenge and hope...we discover again that in so many ways the lives of those people 2,000 years ago are not so vastly different from our own.

We heard this morning Paul addressing the people of Athens. And we know from our history classes back in grade school the names of at least some of the gods of Greece. Here are some of the more familiar ones:

Aphrodite - Goddess of love, romance, and beauty. Her son was

Apollo - Beautiful god of the sun, light, medicine, and music.

Artemis - Independent goddess of the hunt, the forest, wildlife, childbirth, and the moon. Sister to Apollo

Athena - Daughter of **Zeus** and goddess of wisdom, war, and crafts. And the goddess of Athens; Sometimes spelled "Athene".

Poseidon - God of the sea, horses, and earthquakes.

Zeus - Supreme lord of gods, god of the sky, symbolized by the thunderbolt.

Paul notes all of the ways in which the gods and goddesses are honoured throughout the city and begins by affirming the people of Athens in their religiosity. “I see how extremely religious you are in every way,” says Paul. Already we see that he has an understanding of human nature. He begins with affirmation. Then he moves to making the connection between the “unknown god” and the God he knows...suggesting to the people of Athens that this is the God they have always known...this is not necessarily a new thing but a new way of speaking about a very long standing known entity.

Paul also speaks of the words of their poets which suggest that “in God we live and move and have our being”. You have already had the experience of that about which I speak...now I am offering you a name...and the opportunity to address One God rather than the many...a chance to understand that it is the One Spirit which already creates beauty and wonder and mystery and medicine and the sea, and the universe and all who live therein.

How does our life change if we worship One God rather than many gods? How is our living simplified (and made much more difficult) if our entire focus is on Love and nothing else? What does it mean to live **in** God. Paul says “In God we live and move and have our being”. Does this mean that we are part of the body of God? Could we be perhaps the blood stream or the lungs or the legs, or the hands and feet? Could it be that every time we send a little more exhaust into the air we are contributing to the clogging of God’s lungs and every time we sing or relax in the presence of beauty or hug child or kiss an enemy we strengthen God’s heart and soul?

Paul follows what appears to be very reasoned logic to suggest that it is the same God who empowers the prairie wind and the sunflower. It is the same God who instills wisdom and artistic abilities and scientific thought and love, romance and beauty. Our God is not one dimensional but eclectic and energetic and in full three D. And it is **in** that God that we find and live **life**.

The reading from John’s Gospel reminds us that we do not do any of this alone. There is an Advocate...someone who works with us to help us find the way. First United Church in downtown Vancouver offers, among other things, staff who are Advocates to work with the folk who live on the street. The Advocate does everything from assist with the filling out of forms to going to work on their clients’ behalf within systems, structures and governments which are occasionally difficult to maneuver and understand.

John suggests that Jesus has been clear that there will be an Advocate for us. We will be provided with someone who will walk with us and work with us; who will pray with us and hope with us; who will dream with us and struggle with us. We will have no time in our journey as a people of faith where we are left alone, without support.

As we celebrate ministry within the United Church we also give thanks for those who journey with us as our advocates and friends. We celebrate on this day the multiplicity of ministries within our church and the eclectic nature of our denomination. We celebrate our life together **in** Christ and our gratitude for the Spirit which Calls, encourages, challenges and supports us in our living focused only on Love.

Thanks Be.