

Trinity Sunday, Year B (May 26, 2024) – Ascribe to God: Consuming Presence

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “When was the last time you felt ‘in the moment’ and gave your full attention to whatever was present? Was it on a walk or looking over a vista that took your breath away? Was it watching a young one in a school play or on a walk noticing the seasons change?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Isaiah 6:1-8](#).

- As Isaiah lays out this scene, who is present with Isaiah, and how is God portrayed in this vision (Isaiah 6:1-2)?
- Can you describe the scene using each of your senses? Let this be an immersive experience together! What do you see, hear, feel, taste, smell, throughout this encounter with the Divine?
- “Here am I” is a phrase that shows up time and time again in the scriptures. Can you recall times that this phrase has come up for other figures in the Bible? Is there a particular figure who stands out? Why do you think this figure comes to mind for you today?
- The Preaching Notes for May 26 say that there was something about *Presence* that drove Isaiah to his knees. Do you agree that this may be *Divine Love*? If not, how do you see this force (e.g., awe, fear, regret, shame, or confusion)? If yes, what does this “drive-you-to-your-knees-love” look like in your life?
- Notice how an encounter with God’s presence changes Isaiah and seems to open him to new possibilities in his life. Most of us are not ready to listen to the callings of God without some preparation of the heart. What are the experiences you are called to put into your life (e.g., poetry, quiet, hiking, scripture) to be ready to respond with the kind of openness of Isaiah?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

God, who touches our lips and pours over our senses a fresh sense of your Divine presence, open in us a readiness to respond to your presence with our own. Help us to put down our cell phones, our disruptions of life, and the constant list of to-dos long enough to notice your greatness around us. May that presence move us and invite us to say, “Here I am, send me.” Amen.

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year B (June 2, 2024) – Ascribe to God: All-Knowing Creator

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “Who are the people in your life by whom you are truly *known*? What is it like to be *known* in this way?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18](#).

- Think back to a time you tucked a loved one into bed, “hemming” them into a safe slumber. In the first several verses of this scripture, the psalmist uses a collection of similar images to talk about a relationship with God. Which images show the depth of God’s searching and knowing about the psalmist’s life? (Psalm 139:1-6)
- What metaphors does the psalmist use to describe the way we are made? (Psalm 139:13-16)
- The psalmist says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. What do you think that phrase means and why does it (or does it not) matter?
- Notice that the preaching notes interpret the psalm as, “the only knowledge of God accessible is in relationship.” Are there aspects of God we can think about and reason outside of a personal relationship with the Divine?
 - If so, what are the limitations of reasoning out who God is?
 - If not, how can a person deal with personal doubts surrounding reasoning that may seemingly come into conflict (e.g., scientific insights)?
- Let’s get personal. What does it mean to you to consider that you are a “wonderful” work of God? How does considering this reality make you feel (e.g., angry, relieved, unmoved, inspired)?
- Let’s put on our creative thinking caps. The preaching notes for today talk a lot about the need for creeds or a shared list of beliefs: “A *creed*, then, is a statement of belief that defines us as a community of faith. It identifies us for ourselves and for the world at large. We are the people who believe. And because we believe, we live, we serve, we act, we love.”
 - Come together with your group and give each person a chance to write **a single line** of belief based upon reason and/or their relationship with God. (Ask someone to serve as a scribe or use a whiteboard.) Read the *Creed* you have made as part of your closing prayer.
- Have someone agree to email or take pictures/make copies of the creed now to use daily (or whatever is agreed by the group) for one week, even if the creed is not perfect. (Note: Each person has the freedom to adjust the creed as needed for personal use.)

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

God, who has searched us and known us: we are longing to be hemmed in by your love. Release us from what we thought we knew about you and create afresh in us an image of who you might be in our midst. Help us to know you as you know us and therefore to move closer and closer to the grace you have waiting for us today. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

United Methodist Hymnal, 881

Traditional Version

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;*
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic** church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

United Methodist Hymnal, 882

Ecumenical Version

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic** church,

the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Traditional use of this creed includes these words: "He descended into hell."

***universal*

These are the versions in the current *United Methodist Hymnal*.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/apostles-creed-traditional-ecumenical>

Third Sunday After Pentecost, Year B (June 9, 2024) – Ascribe to God: Immutable in Love

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, "Notice the psalmist starts with gratitude (Psalm 138:1). What, if anything, do you have to be grateful for this week?"

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Psalm 138](#).

- What has the psalmist chosen to focus upon in gratitude? Working together, make a list of some of the things for which the psalmist is grateful.
- This psalm is traditionally attributed to King David. Can you think of any troubles a ruler at that time might have had? How about a leader of today?
- The Preaching Notes for today mention that the guiding rhythm of the song or story being sung is God's steadfast love. Think back on your own life. As you observe the highs and lows, where can you notice a rhythm of steadfast love behind it all? What did that love look like in your life and why did (or didn't) this come to mind today?
- The psalmist seems to have a last moment of hesitation or doubt in the last line. Why do you think this last line (Psalm 138:8b) was added instead of just closing with the theme of steadfast love? Does this line challenge in any way your understanding of what it means to worship God well? If so, how? If not, why not?
- The psalmist sets as a goal of thanking God with his "whole heart" (Psalm 138:1a). Assuming this is possible, can you write down (or think of) one way that you will intentionally open your whole heart this week (e.g., a moment of service at your church, time singing at an instrument, visiting someone lonely, a sunset walk, knitting a gift)? If you are ready (and comfortable), ask for accountability for this action this week.

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

God, the source of our soul-strength, we thank you today for ----- (*Each person can offer a one-word gratitude here if desired.*) Gather our gratitude; may the rhythm of your steadfast love be more and more apparent to us each day. You are the God who loves us ridiculously, consistently, and fervently. Let that steadfast love move us to love others. Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B (June 16, 2024) – Ascribe to God: All-Powerful to Save

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “Think about the people in your neighborhood. What are the daily challenges and worries they experience? What would protection mean for them today?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Psalm 20](#).

- God is said to be the God of another biblical figure in the first verse (Psalm 20:1). Who is that person, and can you remember anything about his story? Feel free to look it up in a Bible dictionary or online.
- This psalm seems to be addressed to a specific person or group of people. If you read it first as a personal message and then as a message for a group of people, how does the psalm read differently to you, if at all?
- Imagine that the psalm is written specifically for your neighbors or the people living close to your home. What would be their desires or plans? How would God protect them in their “day of trouble”? What would need to happen?
- The Preaching Notes for today connect Psalm 20 with 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. In what ways do you see the world needing to be saved or reconciled? How about your own neighborhood?
- In what ways is your group feeling called to begin the work of reconciling? Do not hesitate to mention small things like picking up litter or offering help with rides, for example. Make your ideas as relevant and concrete as possible. If you don’t know, in what ways are you called to listen to people’s hearts’ desire and their plans?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

God, whose listening is never on silence and who always has notifications turned on for our problems, we pray for our neighbors today. Help us to listen to their hearts’ desire and the plans they have for the community. Help us to take pride not in the fulfillment of our plans, but in the plans they have for a better future. Amen.

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