

Ordinary Time - Year C

Prophet Margins

Who's up for a summer journey? Isn't that what we do in this season? We pack our things and our families; we jump in the car; and we head off. So, the summer of '22 can be the journey of a lifetime. It will be a journey of exploration and learning and ultimately a journey to discover what's at the heart of our faith.

Now, it's a long journey, to be sure, but we can break it up. We can take this journey in stages, as the old joke goes. Instead of seeing it as a nine-week journey, let's think of it in terms of five shorter stages defined by our traveling companions. They will take us on this journey of discovery. These companions are called *prophets*, and they have a propensity to take us to the edge, even when we don't really want to go. Thus, the title of our series is "Prophet Margins."

Not all that we will see, both outside and inside, will be comfortable and easy. Prophets have a frustrating propensity to speak uncomfortable truths. And the rest of the world—even the rest of the people of God—has an even more frustrating propensity to not listen to them when they speak.

What might we learn if we took the risk to listen? If we took the risk to let these holy ones of God become our traveling companions on our summer journey? We might be troubled, and we will be, but we might also be lifted up. We might be challenged, but we might find reasons for hope, or we might find a renewed vision that inspires us for all the journeys we make.

So, what do you say? Are you up for a journey this summer, a journey to the edge of our faith? Then you're ready for "Prophet Margins."

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – Wash and Be Clean

July 3, 2022 – [2 Kings 5:1-14](#)

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 1: Elisha at the River's Edge

When you sit down to eat, what does your mom ask you? “Did you wash?” It was about hygiene to be sure, but it was also about preparation. The question was about whether you were ready to join the family, to engage in conversation, and presence and enjoyment and connectedness. Were you ready to join in or would you continue to hold yourself apart? Would you dip your toes in the water or stubbornly remain dry?

Our text is about obedience and about submitting to authority, but it is also about recognizing the voice of God in the voices of others. Naaman had little reason to listen to Elisha, except that he listened to the voice of the refugee girl whom he made a servant in his house. What does it take to hear the voice of God? To whom do we listen?

In the story, the foreign General Naaman is invited to wash in the River Jordan to be healed of his leprosy. His willingness to do so is at the crux of the text. Perhaps in worship, there could be a handwashing ritual as folks come forward for Communion. This is the first Sunday of the month, when many churches in our tradition celebrate Communion. There could be something as they step up to receive—a basin and towel perhaps. Handwashing is sometimes substituted for foot-washing during the Holy Week services. But handwashing could be borrowed this week as a sign of submitting to the cleansing power and presence of God.

There could also be anointing and prayers for healing that accompany the theme this week. As a sign of solidarity and of faith, we can lift up the brokenness of the world in which we live and invite the healing Spirit to guide us into paths of wholeness and strength.

This first stage on our journey with the prophets is one of obedience and the willingness to hear the voice of God.

PREACHING NOTES

A Prophet in the Margins

We live in a day and time where leaders seem to take themselves too seriously. Yet, leaders are people. They suffer, they celebrate. They rejoice, they mourn. None of them, however, are able to connect with everyday people as much as they can when they are sick or suffering from some physical ailment.

Typically, upper-level government leaders can secure the best medical consultation and have access to the best pharmaceutical resources. Access to health care is not much of a concern for these leaders—except, of course, when the kind of condition a leader has is not curable.

On one of the conquests of Naaman, a little girl was secured who ended up being the servant of Naaman's wife. She witnessed Naaman's misery as well as the challenge that his wife and servants had in caring for him during his moments of discomfort.

The little girl offered a reference. She knew a prophet. She knew that her master back home could cure him.

Naaman had plenty of political experience in the realm of international relations. It would make sense to invite the king, Aram, to assist him in securing this special service. The king agrees to send a letter to the king of Israel, who ultimately throws a fit. Elisha hears of this fit and sends the king a word of comfort. "Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel" (5:8).

It is done. The king sent many gestures of exquisite kindness. But prophets who are settled in their call and assured in their work are not easily swayed.

Naaman arrives and is not even greeted by the prophet. There is no state dinner, no pomp and circumstance, nothing. "Wash in the Jordan seven times" was pretty much all he got. That was insulting to Naaman. But when you are really sick, there isn't much time for pride.

Naaman, encouraged by one of his servants, dipped in the pool, probably feeling ridiculous. But that feeling didn't last long, as his rough, scaly skin was renewed and restored to the texture of a little boy's skin.

This, on the surface, seems like a fortunate turn of events. But it is far more in-depth than that. Elisha was a prophet who perhaps did some of his greatest work while sitting on his couch. In fact, this may not have been the prophet's work at all. This was God's work.

God, as only God can, used a little poor girl to initiate not only the healing of a man but also the witness that God is able to cure the incurable. This isn't the first time that God has used a poor young girl to bring about immeasurable transformation among those who do not yet know God.

So much was accomplished here.

Elisha shows us how not to be too drawn in with being in the spotlight in the fight when doing prophetic work. This prophet, Elisha, was not mesmerized by political pageantry. He was not frightened by the possibility of political strife. While King Aram sent a note and material luxuries, Elisha sent a soldier to the water.

Elisha never left his house to meet Naaman. He did not once leave his house to talk to the sojourners responsible for ensuring a successful trip. He never left his post as a prophet.

Quite frankly, he was quite content doing all this work by staying and being tucked in the margins.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

General Prayer

God of Liberation,

We are gathered to meet with you this morning. Open our hearts to the many ways you will speak to us. As you did with the prophets, you call us out of our everyday lives to share your message of love and grace. Challenge us today to look within ourselves so that we may be your disciples.

Amen.

Call to Worship

Leader: God calls us to worship today.

People: We are here!

Leader: All are invited— the sick, the well, the believer, and the doubter.

People: We are here!

Leader: Wash us, O God! May we be cleansed by your holy love.

People: We are here!

AMEN.

Prayer of Confession/ Prayer of the People

God of Grace and Glory,

We confess that we lose sight of our identities, finding our worth in our status,
our demographic, or even our location.

Forgive us of our idolatry

Forgive us for placing our worldly identities above your love for us.

Forgive us for when we get distracted by elaborate rituals,
holding ourselves superior, simply due to our place of birth.

You, O God, are the source of our identity.

You, O God, call us to love our neighbor.

You, O God, challenge us to learn from one another.

You, O God, tell us to be different!

May we swim in your healing waters,
resting in the fullness of being children of God.

Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – What Do You See?

July 10, 2022 – [Amos 7:7-17](#)

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 2: Seeing with Amos's Eyes, part 1

If Elisha wants us to listen, Amos wants us to look. God's repeated word to Amos was, "What do you see?" It was an invitation to pay attention, to take off the rose-colored glasses and really see what was before him. How often do we really pay attention to the world around us? Whether we are going to work, or to school; whether we are running our errands or even trying to get in some exercise, do we really look around us to see the state of the world, our nation, or our neighborhood? What do you see?

Within your congregation, there are those who see with a photographer's eyes. Invite them to do a photo essay of the neighborhood where the church sits. Let them find corners of surprising beauty; ask them to find the brokenness and hardship that we've learned to overlook. Use those photos then as bumpers throughout the service on the screens alongside the song lyrics; put up a display in the narthex or hallways leading to the worship space; or use them as bulletin covers or handouts for worship. "What do you see?" is the question of the day.

Now, it's true that God didn't ask Amos to take a stroll around his neighborhood and report what we saw. No, there was a specific vision. God did something, set up something, and asked Amos to see it and interpret it. So, our seeing is a deeper seeing. Where have you seen the handiwork of God? Maybe it was as obvious as a plumbline set up next to the wall of the city, but more likely not. When Jesus talked about God at work, he talked about seeds planted in the ground and yeast hidden in the dough and pearls tucked away somewhere. We have to look harder and look deeper. We have to interpret as we see, understand as we look.

Some like to talk about glory sightings or God sightings when they gather. If your community is used to such language, you could have a time of testimony during worship and just ask who has seen God at work around them; then prepare to be amazed. Perhaps you need some training to learn how to see the handiwork of God before issuing an open call for response. Find the poets among you who are used to seeing in layers, interpreting what they see before them. Give them space to speak or to write as a teaching tool for the whole community to learn to see more deeply. And be clear that this is an everyday task, not a once-in-a-while thing. This is part of what it means to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, to live seeing what is before us, to live believing that God is at work among us, and to live identifying with joy that presence and that call. What do you see?

PREACHING NOTES

In walks Amos! He comes as what we would call a second-career prophet. He was actually a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees.

Engaging the prophetic ministry was a rude awakening from his original career path. As one who is doing the work of announcing God's judgment on the wayward behavior of God's people, he was immediately cast into confusion.

The prophetic work always disturbs those in the type of power that is contrary to justice and liberation. God does not support oppressive governments and systems. Those who occupy such power are seldom willing to relinquish it or make the type of adjustments that align with God's will and way.

Here is where Amos comes in. He is immediately thrown into a character assassination by a corrupt priest, Amaziah. Amaziah was a priest from the House of Bethel, a house known for idolatrous worship. This priest did what many corrupt troublemakers do. He spread rumors. Yup. Rumors. Rumors, to this day, fuel politics and campaigns and threaten to destabilize any credibility of the leader in question.

Amos, however, was confident in who he was and confident in what God had called him to do. To lack this confidence throws one's ministry into a tailspin and tosses the would-be-prophet into a sea of confusion.

Amos made very bold moves. He went to the actual temple at Bethel and told the people there that God was setting a plumbline (today, we mostly use levels). A plumbline, of course, was a string with a weight at the end of it to measure how straight a wall was. Amos informed the idol worshipers and their priest that God was setting a plumbline against the house of Jeroboam and that the king, Israel, and its leadership were likely crooked next to the plumbline.

Now, Amaziah, angered by Amos's message, sent word to the king that a troublemaker is conspiring against him. Conspiring and prophesying may feel like the same thing to the recipient of such a message, but they are entirely different.

The question is, "Are we bold enough to proclaim to a broken world, a bitter, anger-driven world, that God has set a plumbline in our midst?" Are we able to endure the attacks that come to us when we speak truth to power? Are we able to answer God's call to engage the prophetic work, even if that work is done from the margins?

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

General Prayer

God of Prophets,

You call all of us to be prophets. Like shepherds with their sheep, you guide us in the direction you wish us to go. You make clear the path of goodness and righteousness. You set a plumbline for us to follow, an example guiding us toward the Way. May we be aware of your presence in our hearts today, as we use this time to prepare us for the journey to come.

Amen.

Call to Worship

Leader: Friends, what do you see?

People: We see that God has set a path before us.

Leader: What else do you see?

People: We see that God is among us.

Leader: And what else do you see?

People: We see that God calls us to be prophets

All: Together, we will speak God's truth to injustice.

AMEN.

Prayer of Confession/ Prayer of the People

God of Mercy,

We confess today that we, like the prophet Amos,

struggle to accept our call to be prophetic.

We have infinite excuses for why you shouldn't use us.

We are afraid to speak truth to power,

to speak of humility to egotistical systems.

Hiding behind our occupational identities,

we deny that we are all called to share the good news.

When we feel ill-prepared, grant us assurance.

When we feel unworthy, remind us of the *imago dei*

(the image of God) that resides in each of us.

When we struggle to know what words to speak, what moves to make,

keep us in sync with your Holy Spirit, letting you guide all we do.

Give us the courage to be prophets in a world where more grace,

Peace, and love are desperately needed.

Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Living in a Bitter Day

July 17, 2022 – [Amos 8:1-12](#)

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 2: Seeing with Amos's Eyes, part 2

In part one of the Amos stage, we encouraged a look at our own neighborhoods. What do you see where you live and work and play? But we don't stop there. We are called to enlarge our vision and see beyond our own boundaries. This a harder seeing, an often-troubling investigation. God asks Amos, who then asks us, to look deeper. What is underneath our wealth, our comfort, our excess? Who is suffering, who is hurting, who is decaying like the basket of summer fruit in our text, which is coming to the end of its summer? That's the look that we're invited to take today.

This isn't a call to nation bashing, to pointing fingers, and calling names. This isn't about blame. But it is a call to truth, to reality. What do we see? What do we see in our neighborhood about the inequities of the distribution of wealth? What do we see in our nation about the inequities of the distribution of justice? What do we see in our world about the inequities of the distribution of resources? Amos is asking us to take a hard look at the state of our world. This is a look we too often turn away from, claiming to be too busy, too wrapped up in our struggles to see beyond our boundaries.

Maybe the way to find the strength to take this look is to begin by looking at where we are trying to make a difference. Here is an opportunity where the various mission efforts of the church could be lifted up as a way of saying we have seen and we want to respond. We have seen poverty and we want to respond with food distribution and job creation. We have seen injustice and we want to respond with protests and petitions, with pro bono work and advocacy. We have seen the ravages of depression and mental illness and we want to respond with community care plans and mentoring and access to health care.

It's a hard task, but Amos is asking us to see everything—to see a world in need of God's guidance and Spirit; to see a world in need of a kin-dom way of living in community; to see a world in need of diversity and acceptance; to see a world as it really is and not give in to despair. That's the hard part; that's the struggle. The theme of seeing everything needs to be undergirded with hope—hope that with God, all things are possible; hope that while we might not know them yet, there are solutions; there are possibilities. That's our proclamation today: It's a roll up your sleeves and get to work invitation. What do you see?

PREACHING NOTES

There's nothing more exciting than the season of summer. Growing up in Washington, DC, I'd often head to the farmer's market tucked in a small section of the city. It was packed with murmuring, quickly moving patrons loading up on special items that larger commercial grocery stores couldn't seem to secure or duplicate.

There seemed to be a more down-to-earth feel to the farmer's market. It looked like a warehouse for food. There would be an array of meats just waiting to be cooked. I was fascinated and terrified by

seeing the parts of a pig laid in a refrigerated showcase. Pig ears, snouts, feet, and even tails. It was repulsive to me. Then there would be the greens of every type. Let's not forget green beans, squash, sweet potatoes, and then some.

Yet, in the midst of all this noise and aftermath of slaughter, there was one part of the market that was rather serene, at least visually. That was the location of the summer fruit displays. The fruit was beautiful! Decked out in an array of colors, shapes, and sizes. The fuzzy peaches, sharp yellow bananas, the bright red apples, the deep purple grapes, the colorful mixture of lemons and limes and the juicy red strawberries. Usually, in the hot month of July, the fruit was ripe and perfect for the picking.

Looking back over those years, fruit was a special part of summer cuisine. This didn't last, however. It was frustrating in the fall months, seeing a marvelously round cantaloupe waiting to be picked up only to take it back home and discover it has lost its sweetness. It was no longer enjoyable and usually ended up being discarded.

God and Amos have a discussion. God uses a visual to help get the message across. Knowing Amos was a bit of a farmer himself, God brings this narrative in a way Amos could thoroughly understand it. "What do you see?" Amos mentioned a fruit basket and possibly all the enjoyable things related to it came to his mind.

But God didn't see just ripe fruit. God saw fruit that was on its way to being rotten. This fruit didn't have long before it began to be no good.

God likens this scenario to the people of Israel. God is receiving what the people are giving. God sees the injustice; God sees the oppression; God sees the inequality; and God sees the economic injustice. God unfolds for Amos the plan of judgment.

This is not a God we often encounter in the newspaper or in the media today. Today, God is being thrown in the middle of political wars, religious rivalries, and philosophical theories. God always raises up a prophet to represent God's refusal to go along with oppressive behavior. In Amos, we are able to refute any arguments that God is not a God of the oppressed.

I, however, like to turn to Amos, himself. He's a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. He's not seminary trained. He has not been commissioned or ordained. Amos does not have a license to preach. But he has an enormous job. His job is to give a message that people don't want to hear. Quite frankly, he has the kind of job that can get him killed.

If there is a shortage of prophets today, it may be that the same danger exists. In fact, it may not be a danger of being killed. It's a greater danger. There's always the danger of being called a troublemaker, making people uncomfortable, especially when you do these things, well—from the margins.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

General Prayer

Creator God,

Today, we think of your creation. We think of the ground beneath us, the air surrounding us, the water that flows through us. We are in awe of the way a seed can grow into nourishment for our bodies, the way life comes forth from what seems so small. Draw our attention to your creation, so that we might praise you for your incredible gifts!

Amen.

Call to Worship (*this passage also asks the question "What do you see" as did the previous Amos passage*)

Leader: Prophets, what do you see?

People: We see the many ways we distract ourselves.

Leader: What else do you see?

People: We see the good and the bad fruits we have produced.

Leader: What do you see today?

People: We witness and worship God today, grateful for love and forgiveness.

AMEN.

Prayer of Confession/ Prayer of the People

God of Justice,

We confess to you today that we often find ourselves

feeling bitter, distraught, and ashamed.

We far too often fail to take accountability for our sins and wrongdoings.

In an effort to feel better about ourselves, we overfill our plates with tasks,

hoping to atone for our misdeeds.

We confess that we have trampled on the needy, choosing greed.

We confess that we have brought ruin to the poor of the land,

neglecting many parts of your creation.

We confess that we have practiced deceit, fearful of being exposed.

We confess that far too often, we choose busyness
over the gift of your loving presence.

We lament our mistakes to you, O God.

We mourn the harm we have caused knowingly and
unknowingly, individually and collectively.

We ask your forgiveness to envelop us,
inspiring us to make amends with ourselves and others.

Open our eyes that we may see the lessons you place before us.

Help us better love you by loving your creation.

Amen

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Pity on the House

July 24, 2022 – [Hosea 1:2-10](#)

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 3: Hosea's Risky Love, part 1

Hosea puts to rest that old cliché that the Old Testament is about the God of Law and Judgement and the New Testament is about the God of Love. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures is much more complex than such an adage can describe. As is the God of the New Testament, of course. But here we have a God who calls for risky love. It is a love that responds lovingly even when hurt, even when not returned.

So, how do we present that risky, prophetic love without falling into sentimentality? By telling stories. Who can tell of how someone never gave up on them, though they made bad choices repeatedly? Who can describe caring for a parent who no longer recognizes them and even lashes out at them? Who can relate a story of setting boundaries and sticking to them, even while holding out hope for transformation? Better yet, who could tell of seeing that, observing someone loving like that? Or who can talk about receiving that, experiencing that kind of risky love?

Who tells the story is an important consideration. One of the functions of the body of Christ is to lift one another up. Just like with the discernment of gifts, we don't always see this kind of risky love in ourselves. Others may be able to see what we are doing better than we can. Maybe invite the congregation to nominate those who show this kind of perseverance in love. Maybe ask this week for everyone to think of someone and then report back next week for part two of "Hosea's Risky Love"

A key element to this understanding of risky love is that we are also called to love those who are hard to love. We aren't given permission to cut off anyone here. We don't draw lines and say we'll love this one and not that one. And there is risk, of course, that is why it is called risky love. But we go forward with eyes wide open. We aren't fodder for abuse; that's not loving. Sometimes we are called to love from a distance. Sometimes to protect ourselves and others, we have to withdraw, but we can still love. We can still hope for transformation; we can still fervently pray for the other to fulfill all that God has in store for them. Hosea was called to love like that. And so are we.

PREACHING NOTES

Hosea begins his ministry with marriage. He, unlike many prophets before, didn't get a shot behind a podium. He didn't get a test run speaking to a king or a nation. Hosea begins his ministry with an assignment. It's a most unusual assignment at that. God instructs him to get married. Of course, this isn't anything out of the ordinary for a young man. But what is out of the ordinary is the profession of the one with whom he'll be betrothed. God wants Hosea to marry a prostitute.

This directive comes on the heels of God being frustrated and fed up with the people of Israel and their rebellious ways. God was the God that delivered, rescued, and redeemed the people, yet they were swayed by idols compromising and placing their relationship with God in harm's way. This angers God, which means it hurts God to be abandoned by a people who had so quickly forgotten who the only true God is.

God wants Hosea to know of this despair. God wants Hosea to know the bitter sting of love unrequited. God wants Hosea to know the deep pain of what it's like to see those who once worshiped, praised, and celebrated you abandon you to false gods.

Prostitutes were people who engaged in acts that are reserved for love and marriage—without the love or marriage. Those acts looked seemed like intimacy but they were shallow, cold, and meaningless. This was much like the religion of the people of Israel.

So, Hosea obeys God and marries a woman from Diblaim, a city which meant “two cakes.” Her name was Gomar. Hosea doesn't resist this woman or the idea of her. In fact, he marries her, and they begin to have children together, building what seems to be a picture-perfect marriage.

God prepares the prophet to receive certain heartbreak that equipped him to serve in the prophetic engagement. It's hard to speak about something from a place not known and not felt. It is often those who have known poverty intimately; those who have been benefited and, in some cases, saved by being an immigrant; those who lost their business to larger corporations; those who have been called derogatory names; those who have been passed over for promotion because they were women; and those who have been muted by strict voting laws—these are a few who bring to the prophetic ministry a tender, personal, and deep passion because they have had the human experience of suffering and the desire to see the redemptive healing that God can bring.

Now, how have you been prepared for the prophetic ministry? How has God equipped you for the task given to your hands? How can you lead your people to embrace their preparedness as a launchpad for ministry?

To borrow the phrase from another who was connected to someone being prepared to deliver people, “Perhaps, you have been called for such a time as this.” You have been called to do a mighty work. Who better to do it than a prophet from the margins?

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

God, Our Holy Parent,

There are moments we feel as though we are separated from you, times where we have chosen our own agendas over you. As we gather to worship today, remind us that despite our wandering souls, you are still “home” to us. Thank you, nurturing God, for welcoming us into this space today. Amen.

Call to Worship

Leader: Children of the Living God!

People: God loves us with the love of a parent.

Leader: Children of the Living God!

People: Despite our failings, God continues to save us.

Leader: Children of the Living God!

People: We are here to worship the God of love, justice, and grace.

AMEN.

Prayer of Confession/ Prayer of the People

God of Salvation,

We are grateful for the gift of your love.

A love that has no bounds, a love that keeps reaching out to us, calling us to you.

We are more than your people ... we are your beloved children.

You reiterate throughout scripture your readiness to hear us when we pray to you.

God, you are our father.

God, you are our mother.

God, you are our family.

God, you care for us and love us in ways we cannot comprehend.

Forgive us when we forget how much you love us.

Forgive us for times we are unfaithful to you, times we fail to do as you've called.

God, thank you for loving us in the most sacred and scandalous ways.

You are God, and we trust that you journey with us in all things.

Amen.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Cords of Kindness

July 31, 2022 – [Hosea 11:1-11](#)

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 3: Hosea's Risky Love, part 2

In part one of this stage, we were given the model of love of husband and wife. Now our text brings us the image of the love of children given to our care. This seems like familiar ground, even if we've not been parents. Maybe we've helped out in the nursery, maybe we have babysat, maybe we've just observed. There's no question that caring for children is hard work. It's often thankless. (Here's a hint: take the opportunity to say thank you to those who have responsibility for caring for children— staff and volunteers. What they do is important for the life of the whole church!)

The other obvious point is that this is transformational love. You teach and guide and set boundaries and encourage and support, and more. There are ages and stages in the life of those in our care, and each one has its own struggles. Some find one stage easier than another, but all take effort and perseverance. How can we lift up the task of raising children in our community and church? What can we do to give honor to those who take the risk of loving like this?

There is a subtext to the passage this week. There is evidence that the child (Israel) rebels against the parent (God). What parent hasn't been there? What teacher doesn't face opposition? What mentor isn't moved to throw up his/her hands and want to give up? Even God seems pushed to the brink. Yet, the commitment to love, the faithfulness of God's love perseveres, even in the hard times. But tread carefully here, worship team. Be aware of broken hearts and parental wounds. Also, there are offspring who didn't have that persevering love experience in their lives, and the hurt can linger for a lifetime.

That is not to say we avoid the subject, but that we go with compassion. We proclaim with understanding and with forgiveness. And we remember that only God is always faithful. So, we offer grace wherever we can. That's what can make risky love work.

PREACHING NOTES

Hosea, in the third chapter, is commanded to go and secure his wife from the life she seemed prone to live. We don't have too many details about where she was, with whom she was, and why she was there. Biblical tradition places her in the category of being a prostitute, while other Jewish writings suggest she was a harlot. We don't hear from Gomer herself.

What we know is that Hosea loved her—not just because she was the mother of his children, not just because she was an intricate figure in their household. He loved her so much that he went to secure her by paying her to return. At least, this is what it looks like on the surface.

Hosea is deeply involved in the crisis of his personal life. It is a mess. It is a horrific situation. Hosea 3 suggests they are separated—if not physically, they are separated emotionally and certainly spiritually. This continues to shed light on the deep chasm between God and Israel. Both stories are unfolding simultaneously.

It's not until Hosea gets married, has children, and goes to seek his wandering wife and restore her to a full relationship with him, however, that he knows what it is to speak to this situation in Israel. He is now equipped to hear what God is saying and convey like no other the emotions that God emits in Hosea 11.

As a loving parent, God is reflecting in Hosea 11. He is remembering what it was like to love them only to see them fall to a non-existent god, Baals. Using the imagination of a parent, he is recalling those days of teaching his people, guiding them, blessing them, and loving them. Yet, he had to be in the role that no parent really enjoys: that is the role of chastising a strong and separate will of the child who seems to abandon his parent's protection. Even God can't go back on God's word, and, as a result, the people have earned the consequences that come with idol worship and turning their backs on God which leads to destruction and exile.

But, even here, we see God not wanting this. We see God struggling with this. We see God not able to just leave his children, Ephraim. As Hosea sought to secure his wife from bondage and to reestablish their relationship, similarly God does this to Ephraim and Judah.

Here's the challenge: Ephraim continued to resist and reject. Ephraim continued in the way of sin. But God had a vision and a promise. He'd restore them with the power of his voice, but until then, God endures the heartbreaking experiences of watching the people he loved dig themselves in a deep spiritual hole.

This too, is the work of the prophet. It is to weep, plead, beg with a people who sometimes just won't listen. To be a prophet is to mourn over results that the people just don't see.

"I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that we as a people, will get to the Promised Land" (King, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," April 3, 1968). These words were spoken, by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. the night before he was killed. He gave his life for a nation that resisted him and hated him. He would confess a year before his death that his dream had turned into a nightmare. This was the voice of despair. It is a voice often known too well by the prophet who hopes from the margins.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

God of Compassion,

Today, remind us of what really matters. Often, we show up for worship expecting to be entertained. Instead, may we be active participants in worship today, focusing on kindness, love, and our sacred worth in you. God, you are so good! And you are in our midst!

Amen.

Call to Worship (from [Psalm 107: 1-9](#))

Leader: Give thanks to God! For God is good.

People: We give thanks for God's steadfast love.

Leader: Give thanks to God! For God's love endures.

People: We give thanks that God is at work among humankind.

Leader: Give thanks to God! For only God can satisfy us.

People: We give thanks to God for filling our spiritual hunger with good things.

AMEN.

Prayer of Confession/ Prayer of the People

God of Healing,

As you spoke through the prophet, Hosea,

Lead us with cords of human kindness; Lead us with bands of love

Yet what does it mean to be led with cords of human kindness and bands of love?

Remind us of the connection our souls have to you, O God.

You tug at our cords to remind us that we also need the kindness of other humans.

You pluck at our heartstrings to remind us of the love you've placed within each of us.

But we still become distracted.

We get lost in our aggravations, disappointments, and deep-seated longings.

Sometimes, it seems as though the negativity and sadness will swallow us whole.

How are we to turn this pain into love and kindness?

God, you know these feelings all too well; oftentimes, as a result of human action or inaction.

The story, repeated over and over again in our sacred texts, tells of your incredible love for us.

You, O God, choose love, despite the pain.

May we do the same, trusting that the Holy One is in our midst.

Amen.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – Learn to Do Good
August 7, 2022 – Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 4: The Edge of Isaiah, part 1

If there was a stage you'd probably prefer to skip, it would be this one. Isaiah seems at his grumpiest height. Sure, that's the rep that prophets have. But it seems excessive here. Yet, as a crusader for justice, you have to ruffle a few feathers from time to time. To get something done, you need a "just saith the Lord" now and again. And Isaiah is ready to step up to the plate for this one.

And we can't wriggle out by saying he isn't talking to us; he's talking to the rulers; there's a list of kings at the beginning of the book reminding us that Isaiah had staying power. He outlasted all of them. But when you get to the detail of the rant, he's asking us to take a look at how we worship.

No, it isn't about worship styles, instrumentation, or screens. It's about the heart. It's about whether our words in worship match our words the rest of the week. Whether what we pray for is what we work for. Whether what we hope for is what we live for. This is a service of worship for examining our hearts. What do the words we say, recite, repeat mean to us? Anything?

This would be a great time to take your time working your way through the liturgy and the hymnody of worship. Invite participants to read the words before praying them or singing them. Ask them to take these words into their hearts and to sing them and pray them as if they really mean them. It seems obvious, but is it? Even something as common as the Lord's Prayer can become words that we just say without thinking after so many repetitions. Maybe pray the Lord's Prayer more slowly, pausing after each phrase, and let the power of the words sink in to the soul of the congregation. Live into the words that we pray. And ask if we are brave enough to really pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

There is, of course, another layer to this text. It isn't just about what happens in worship, but about what happens where we live and work every other day of our lives. Worship can be an inspiration to live for God's justice in the world. There can be invitations to corporate acts of mission and service, witness, and challenge to the status quo. Doing justice is hard, but it becomes possible when the whole community works together. There should be more than just getting out there and doing something. It should be more like, "Here is what we are doing; come and join us." That's the only way we can learn to do good, as Isaiah pleads with us to do.

PREACHING NOTES

We turn to Isaiah this week. He doesn't waste any time getting right into the matter. Prophecy is one of those preaching styles we want to hear occasionally. There is a fear that we wear the people down with our constant insistence to do good. The consequences are severe, however. There really is no time to waste. Prophecy is urgent. It is disturbing, and it makes no room for devotional coziness. We are thrust

in feeling the judgment of God on the one hand and seeing, often against our will, the decay so very much present around us.

The judgment we encounter today is not different from the judgment extended to any other community that forgot God and turned away. This judgment is similar to the others when it comes to injustice, classism, and ill treatment of the poor.

This judgment requires strict notice, for three primary things will take place: The country will lay desolate, the cities will be burned with fire, and strangers will devour the land. To lay desolate is to be void of not just essentials, but of life, joy and peace. The country may be huge, but the common health of its individual citizens is what gives it strength. Once a nation loses its sight of the health and welfare of its inhabitants, the country will run short of its ability to sustain itself. Cities often erupt with protests and/or riots.

To do the prophetic work is to engage in the ministry of warning. Might there be any need of warning today that emerges from pulpits across the world? We can no longer pretend that God is not concerned about the social, political, economic, and theological instability in the world. No longer can we pretend that the gospel is for the individual and not for the community, the city, the nation, and the world. No longer can we pretend that God has turned a blind eye to those who are “the least among us.” Sometimes, being a prophet in the margins is to be a prophet boldly leading from the center.

What is our warning this day? What has God pushed us into the center to say? If we get stuck answering this question, worry not. There is a prophet who can help us.

“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (verses 19-20).

And now, so must ours.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

God of the Past, Present, and Future,

Seldom do we know what you’ll ask of us each day. Many times, we are in the moment when we feel the nudging of your spirit to act. As we spend time in your house today, may our souls be aligned with you, so that we may readily respond when you call!

Amen.

Call to Worship

Leader: God calls us here today.

People: We bring our full selves to God: our strengths and our weaknesses.

Leader: God calls YOU here today.

People: We offer all we are to God: our talents and our inadequacies.

Leader: God calls every part of us to bring divine love and light into the world!

People: We respond to that call, trusting that God is at work within us.

AMEN.

Prayer of Confession/ Prayer of the People (adapted from Isaiah 1: 16-20)

God of Redemption,

You call us to wash ourselves clean, so that our transgressions fall away.

May we cease doing evil, learn to do good, and seek justice.

You call us to rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow.

May we not forget these responsibilities you've set before us.

We are grateful for the reminder from the prophet Isaiah that,

though our sins are like scarlet, you'll make us like snow!

Even though they are red like crimson, you make them like wool!

May we be obedient and willing followers, pleasing unto you.

Amen.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – Yielding Wild Grapes

August 14, 2022 – [Isaiah 5:1-7](#)

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 4: The Edge of Isaiah, part 2

If part one of Isaiah was difficult, then this is impossible. And the prophet calls this a love song. Plus, and this is where it gets troublesome, Israel saw itself as the vineyard; later, the church began to see itself as the new vineyard. And the vineyard is tagged for destruction in this text. It's hard to find a positive spin to put on this. Maybe we should check the gospel text!

Hang with Isaiah for a while; let's see if there is a way we can hear his pronouncement in a productive way. A key verse is verse 3: "my people judge between me and my vineyard." We love our churches; we expend a lot of effort to maintain the buildings and to fill them with ministries and events, fellowship, and service. We spend a lot of time there. We love our church, and we should!

Isaiah is asking us, however, if we sometimes lose perspective when it comes to the church, God's vineyard. The question for worship today might be, "What is the church for?" Supporting the church is not supposed to be an end in itself. Our church mission statement is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Not disciples of the church. Not for the transformation of the church. The church is the means, not the end of what we do. So, how can we make that our focus for worship today?

What if we celebrate the church by featuring what happens outside the church? What if we lift up ministry that may be happening in small ways throughout our neighborhood, or city, or world? What if we take time to point out that the church is wherever the congregation is and does whatever it is each member does? Somewhere theologian Leonard Sweet said that the church has an "edifice complex" and needs to move beyond buildings to focus on being the presence of God at work in the world.

Wild grapes, according to Isaiah, means that the people of God were following no leadership but their own will and conscience. God wants us to be cultivated grapes, guided by the Word and tended by the Spirit, wherever we live and work. While we are thankful for the church buildings, for the beauty and utility of these structures, it is the people and how they live in the world that are the church at work.

PREACHING NOTES

Vineyards are aesthetically beautiful places. They have beautiful greenery, well-manicured lawns, and rows of grapevines. They are exquisite and breathtaking. The rolling hills are marvelous to see. In biblical days, a vineyard was a prized possession. They were well taken care of. It actually took a great deal to take care of them. There was always the nurturing of the grapes or whatever fruit was featured. This tending to the vineyard was all orchestrated for one thing: grapes—fresh, whole, round, perfect grapes. Workers in the vineyard were meticulous and detailed in their care.

However, God speaks of grapes gone wild. There is no excuse for wild grapes. They've been watered, given good shade so as to not be parched by the sun. They've been given the best environment for

growth. So, it's not adding up. Why has God's vineyard, a beautiful masterpiece, somehow led to the production of wild grapes? These grapes were not sufficient, healthy, or wholesome for their intended use.

This would not be the last time God was disappointed by fruit. You'll recall Jesus while on a journey walked up to a fig tree that looked like it was ready for the picking, but it was not. Jesus was seemingly angry at the tree for false advertising. The tree was presenting an appearance that didn't match its reality. This too was a lesson.

Today, our vineyards are buildings. Big churches in some cases. Sanctuaries with major lighting and technology packages and cafés and eateries to enjoy one's sojourn there. The visuals can be breathtaking, and clearly the buildings are well-cared for.

Yet, the world seems to still be struggling with issues of deep oppression, massive healthcare needs, racism in housing markets, immigration discrimination, ageism, misogyny, xenophobia, and nationalism.

How can this be with so many vineyards in our midst? Could it be that they are producing wild grapes?

The formula for getting all this corrected remains: repentance. The lack of repentance will prompt God to remove the workers in the vineyards, dismantle the vineyards, and let the people have their way. This, of course, means that there will scorching heat, weather, and lack of nourishment that will cause great suffering and despair.

There is nothing wrong with great vineyards. But that is only a little bit of what it means to be a people connected to their God.

How is God calling us to address grapes gone wild in our contexts? Be mindful, however. Jesus did this in his opening homily in Nazareth after reading from this very book, Isaiah.

Once the scroll was rolled up, he began to announce that the day was at hand when God would finally get what God wanted for those who were oppressed. He would be the one to complete it.

This kind of sermon angers a church, and it almost got Jesus killed. Nevertheless, it was from here that he launched his messianic ministry; albeit, from the margins.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

General Prayer

Holy God,

You offer such goodness to us. You give so much to us, blessing us with resources that many go without. Despite your goodness, humanity has collectively responded selfishly, taking what we can get, using it for our own gain, and not thinking of the consequences. Forgive us for producing rotten fruit when you've given us everything we need so that ALL people can thrive. May we learn to be more like you, bringing forth goodness and care so that good fruit may come to the world.

Amen.

Call to Worship (adapted from [Psalm 80: 14-19](#))

Leader: We cry out—

People: Restore us ,O God!

Leader: We petition—

People: God, may your face shine upon us!

Leader: We lift our voices—

People: We turn toward you, O God and call on your name!

AMEN.

Prayer of Lament

God-Who-Listens,

We approach you today with a lot of questions. Bad things happen far too often, and we can't understand why. God, why does it feel like more and more people face death, unemployment, injustice, and sickness every day? Why do tragedies occur, leaving us at a loss for words? Families are torn apart, becoming foes to those who were friends. Humanity is facing more global distress than we can navigate. Our news feeds are overwhelmed with articles about natural disasters, fires, war, mental illness, racial violence, disparity in gender and sexuality; and the list goes on . . . and on . . . and on. Why do these things happen, God? We try to do the right thing, yet bad things still happen. We try to nurture the seeds you have planted, hoping for an abundant harvest. Yet, the harvest seems bleak.

There are no easy answers to these questions. All we know is that we are called to continue the work, so that what is rotten may become fertilizer for something new. God, remind us that you are with us in all things. You are a God of seasons, of beginnings and endings. Despite the changes all around us, you are steadfast. Thank you, God, for letting us lift these concerns to you. Thank you for holding space for us to share our grievances. Even though tragedy continues, we are grateful for the peace we know in your presence.

Amen.

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – I Knew You

August 21, 2022 – [Jeremiah 1:4-10](#)

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 5: Jeremiah's Cracked Pots, part 1

We're back on more comfortable ground this week. Here we have the promise of presence. Supposedly, John Wesley's final words were "best thing of all, God is with us." We love to celebrate that God is with us and we are not alone. That is a powerful message at any time of the year.

Jeremiah knows intimately about the presence of God. In fact, truth be told, if you keep reading in the book, presence can be a burden to bear. Jeremiah struggled with it. God seemed to want to direct all his steps, not just the ones to church each week. God seemed to want to put all the words in his mouth, not just the ones he used to make prophecies.

So, the question for this week might be how much of your life are you really willing to surrender to God? We celebrate our independence in this country, perhaps to excess. Here is where faith runs counterculturally to that prevailing thought. We surrender ourselves to God. Yet God chooses to use the gifts that are within us to direct our paths. This means that God works with us, with the best in us, to help us fulfill our calling and our potential. Like Hosea and his desire to love us into wholeness, Jeremiah claims that God knows us into service and witness. God works within us to make us what we already are and to grow into what we will be.

We celebrate that partnership with God, our creator and our parent. Worship could find space for testimony about how God has given direction or commissioning. This might be a time for you, pastor, to share your call story if it has been a while. How does God speak to us? How do we know God's direction in our lives? Any way we have to help the body understand this or at least have an inkling and an example or two would be tremendously helpful. There is a lot of uncertainty about how this works. Jeremiah and all the prophets make it sound like there are voices in the night. And maybe for some, there are. But for most of us, there is a warm heart, or a persistent urge, or something that brings tears or hope. In all of these ways, God through the Spirit, makes God's will known for our lives. Because God knows us so intimately, God is always on our side.

PREACHING NOTES

Fear and intimidation are difficult to overcome. Prophets are people who have been chased down, ganged up on, lied about, isolated, excluded, denounced, and in some cases—far too many cases—killed.

I'm not sure anyone would sign up for this job without a deep connection with the God that called them to it. It's the type of job that you could be great at, and it would still be a difficult job to manage.

At the end of the day, most of us want to be included, normal, everyday kind of people. Prophecy often interferes with that possibility. Doing prophetic work requires a certain kind of boot camp that only God can provide. The second phase of it, the work provides.

Prophetic work can lead to sadness, depression, despair, fear, and spiritual fatigue. Engaging in prophetic ministry is starting something that is very messy and dangerous at first. Surviving this first stage requires a resolve that is deep within.

Jeremiah wept. Elijah ran and hid. Hosea was discouraged and fed up. Nehemiah left the comfort of his job. It's tough! Yet, there is something that can get us through. In fact, there are three things that we might want to recall this Sunday.

The first is, God did not make a mistake in calling us to this ministry. God did thorough research and examination, even before we came into being. We were made for this work. God's promise to not abandon us never fails. We all feel inadequate to do what God asks us to do. We give God the list of reasons why selecting us is not a good idea. Nevertheless, God does not give up on us.

Second, God handles those who stand in the way of God's work being done. The temptation is to lose sight of the actual goal and get distracted by those who are causing us personal grief, character assassinations, personal attacks, and sabotaging efforts. These tactics aren't our responsibility to manage. God tells Jeremiah to not let them get in the way of him doing what God told him to do. To be a prophet is to stand, no matter what. Stand in fatigue. Stand in loss. Stand in the conviction that God's voice can shake the foundations and remind the people to turn from their ways. Stand.

Third, you must trust what you see. Fatigue often gives us a sense of doubt and cowardice. God asked Jeremiah and Amos the same question? "What do you see?" He asked Jeremiah thrice, "What do you see?" Jeremiah saw a branch of an almond tree, a boiling pot, and figs, some very good and some very bad. Amos saw a plumbline and a basket of fruit. Zachariah was another prophet given the same question. He saw a lampstand of gold with its bowl for oil on top of it and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts. On another occasion, he saw a flying scroll with a length of twenty cubits and its width of ten cubits.

Prophetic ministry requires that we trust what "we" see, not what news and media outlets, social media posts, or even our own bias sees. The prophet must rise above all these short vision casts and instead see what God is showing us. That is the call. That requires courage. Trust what you see.

And it helps, of course, to see what God is showing us from a place called, "the margins."

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

General Prayer

God Who Knows Us,

In Jeremiah, we read how you formed our souls, long before anyone knew us. You consecrated us for kingdom work long before our birth. You've called us to be a prophet to the nations! We know that life moves in cycles of growth and destruction, picking and pulling, building and overthrowing.

Yet, we may rest in the assurance that we are known and loved by God, who creates beautiful things!

Amen.

Call to Worship and Action

Leader: The Lord calls to us to go into the world—

People: We will go!

Leader: God commands us speak as God commands—

People: We will speak!

Leader: God assures us, “Do not be afraid” —

People: We trust that God will deliver us!

AMEN.

Prayer of Confession/ Prayer of the People

Holy God,

You have created us with purpose.

You have given each of us gifts and talents that we might use to

bring forth your kingdom to this earth!

We confess that we selfishly use our gifts for personal gain, forgetting that they, too,

are a means of tithing.

You have bestowed on us unique abilities that allow us to help your children across the world—

the poor, the orphan, the widow, the immigrant, and the oppressed.

How beautiful a gift you have given us! Forgive us when we forget to share it.

As you did for the prophet Jeremiah, put your hand to our mouths,

our hands, our feet, our minds... all the different parts of us

so that we may speak,

act, write, teach, comfort, and share

your good news!

May our magnificently different voices carry the incredible message of your love,

redemption, and grace.

We are called to be prophets!

Amen.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – Cracked Cisterns

August 28, 2022 – [Jeremiah 2:4-13](#)

PLANNING NOTES

Stage 5: Jeremiah's Cracked Pots, part 2

God is on our side—until we're not. Wait, does that make sense? God is on our side, but sometimes we wander away. Sometimes we are off track. That's what sin means, off track. All the shouting in our text today is because folks don't know that they are off track. This isn't anger or wrath. This is God calling God's people back. They've wandered off. Worse, they think all that they have received is due to their own efforts rather than a gift from God. They've forgotten to be grateful. All their gratitude has leaked out.

That's the image that Jeremiah offers. We leak. We can't hold the grace of God, the water of life. We receive it, we fill up, week by week, but it leaks out. And if we don't return to be filled again, we're going to go dry. We're going to be running on empty. We need to return to the source. No one, Jeremiah reminds us in this text, thought to ask about the author of all the goodness the people enjoy. No one thought to wonder where God is in the business of their lives.

So, we've gathered this week to worship and do that very thing, to fill up on God's presence and to ask where God is in the rest of our lives. And to be reminded that God has always been present. We're the ones who wandered off. We're the ones who said that we could handle it on our own. So, now we're back to ask again for God to be present, for God to make God's self known to us. And we need to do it again and again because we leak. We are cracked cisterns, letting the presence of God leak away from us day by day until we return to be reminded.

Part of what worship could offer this week are ways to practice the presence of God in the in-between times. What can we do throughout the week to be reminded that God is with us? How could we pray, what could we read, what might we do with and for one another to keep us on track and close to God? This is an opportunity for the spiritual disciplines.

Maybe a card with a common prayer could be handed out or emailed to every member with the request that for the next week at a specific time, each member pulls out that card and prays the prayer. It is a gathering of the body without gathering. Knowing that other members of this family of God are doing the same brings a deeper level of experience to the act of praying. Maybe a daily email could be sent at a specific time to every member with access to email. Or a text. Some way of reminding each and all that God is ready to help patch up the leaks, so that we might retain more of the grace we cracked cisterns might need.

PREACHING NOTES

As a pastor, I have sat in between more than a few marital couples that have been at odds. It is a sad thing to witness a marriage that is in trouble. It is embarrassing; it is shameful to the couple; and it is some of the deepest pain imaginable. Conflict, especially the type of conflict that challenges trust and breaks hearts, is a rough patch for all close to the matter.

In fact, handling the subject of marriage homiletically, can be a real trigger for people, depending on their experience and a slippery slope for the preacher to navigate. It is in these experiences that we learn of gut-wrenching, deep sorrow, and grief. When marriages are tried, couples lose a certain level of innocence and fantasy about their relationship. Yet, it is an opportunity for them to grow deeper in faith, love, and commitment.

For this reason, there is no wonder God uses, on more than one occasion, the metaphor of marriage when it comes to describing the bruised relationships between him and the people of Israel. The focus is on how God has no desire to abandon the people, but there are consequences, miserable consequences for such abandonment. God is not in a position to be undervalued, forgotten, or victimized by infidelity. We have clear data on how God is relational, and humanity has a roll to honor the relationship. In this “honoring,” the great vision of humanity is realized. All will be fed; all will be taken care of; there will be no injustice; there will be no classism and racism. There will be neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free. But until then, God has to contend with a “bride” that is walking out of God’s life.

To avoid this disaster, God raises up a leader, a prophet, a spokesperson who has enough spiritual depth to see, hear, and feel the disturbance in God’s voice and the suffering among God’s people.

These prophets with whom we’ve traveled this season have all concluded their ministry. Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah have spent time healing, pleading, loving, and weeping for a lost people—a people whose personal deterioration led to communal suffering.

God can’t be pleased at where we are in these moments. God can’t be pleased with ill treatment of those seeking refuge. God can’t be pleased with the hatred of people because of their color. God can’t be pleased with people not caring for the sick. God can’t be pleased with increasing poverty and decreasing opportunities for people to change their destiny. God can’t be pleased with a people who have displaced him with other gods, like bureaucracy, Christian nationalism, exclusivity, self-righteousness, greed, and religious abandonment of mission and service. There is still a plumbline hanging from the wall. There is still a summer fruit basket in the narthex of our churches. There is still a vineyard with only wild grapes. There is still a fig tree with good fruit threatened by bad fruit.

The question is, “Is there a prophet around?” What a tragedy it would be to glance at the margins and see no sign of a prophet. Whatever shall we do?

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

Infinite God,

You have brought us into abundance. You have given us physical and spiritual nourishment You have led us to flowing waters of grace. We come to worship today, seeking these things for our souls. May we accept what you offer us today in its entirety, that we might share with others.

Amen.

Call to Worship/ Breath Prayer

Leader: Family, breathe in the love of God with me.

People: (*deep breath in*)

Leader: Beloved Children of God, breathe out your self-doubts.

People: (*deep breath out*)

Leader: Knowing that you are loved by the God of the Universe, I welcome you to worship today.

People: Our hearts are ready.

AMEN.

Prayer of Confession/ Prayer of the People

God of Life,

We confess that we have gone after worthless trinkets, often losing our own worth in our
materialistic desires.

Instead of claiming our true identity as Children of God, we define ourselves by other titles.

We are more than our jobs, our families, our stuff, our lack of stuff.

We are more than our hair, our size, our skin, or even our age.

While these things inform who we are, they are not what ultimately defines us.

You define us.

You are the God of Life, the true Living Water.

Our own vessels can never quench the thirst we have for your Living Water.

We try to drink from our own cisterns, cracked as they are.

May we embrace what it means to partake of water that lives and moves,
not limiting ourselves to lives of stagnancy like water in a jar.

God of Life, keep flowing around us, that we may float in your Living Water!

Amen.