

Worship with Rejoicing

INTRODUCTION

Why should you, in the depths of the summer slow-down, join in this dance with David and Solomon? It's a great question, admittedly. But a character like David is hard to resist during the summer beach read season. There is something dynamic about David, something compelling and yet something disturbing about the life that he leads and the choices that he makes. You can't help but wonder why David is considered a "man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). Clearly, it wasn't because David was perfect and always did things the right way. So, how do we understand such a description, and how does Solomon carry on this legacy?

There are many attributes and inclinations that might help us understand what it means to be a person after God's heart. In this series, we invite you to consider that, for David, worship was life. Worship wasn't something David did, we might say; it wasn't a specific time in the day or week. Rather, worship was who he was. David lived and breathed worship. Yes, sometimes he got it wrong; sometimes he followed impulses that led him astray. And sometimes he got confused about who was the object of this worship and got in the way of the God he loved. But through it all, David lived as though his life was an offering to God.

Another way to approach this would be to say that life is worship. In this series, we will walk together through the order of worship and find insight into how our lives are shaped and bounded by our inclination and calling to worship. We find ourselves seeking after God's heart as we worship and as we live. And when we learn to live wholeheartedly, we will find our way to worship with rejoicing.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Gathering for Worship

July 14, 2024

[2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

A worship series about worship: that feels kind of meta, I know. Over the years, though, I've found that people really do need regular reminders about what it means for us to gather for worship week in and week out. Some have never really been taught about the flow and purpose of worship, while others knew at one time but have become distracted by the routine of it all. And don't get me wrong—there's something beautiful about routine, about knowing the liturgy and the hymns and the rhythms so well that they feel as close to you as your own heartbeat. But routine is a double-edged sword, because how often do we notice our own heartbeat with wonder, gratitude, and a desire to go deeper?

Thankfully, we have some good and quite fascinating companions who will accompany us throughout this series. King David and King Solomon loom large in the Old Testament. Their influence, fame, and infamy are felt throughout the biblical text and beyond. And yet, worship has a way of bringing them back down to size with the rest of us mortals. But more about that later.

This week, we begin with gathering. This is an excellent Sunday to pay extra attention to hospitality, to give thanks for ushers and greeters, and to consider how the entrances into worship—physical, attitudinal, and liturgical—draw people into the space together. Can everyone use the entry doors? Are there signs and volunteers that can help newcomers? Do long-time members receive just as much welcome as brand-new visitors? Does the worship space encourage people to interact with one another as they settle in their seats? Does the gathering music and/or the art in the room inspire people to take a moment to breathe, to center, and to be fully present in the space? These are not just questions for you, worship planners! Consider whether you might lift some of these questions up for the congregation to consider and pray about. *Everyone* is involved in the act of gathering because we can't gather without one another's presence in the space.

Since this is a seven-week series, take time here at the beginning to consider how you might want to address the art on the altar and/or chancel. How might you use visual images and color to tie the Sundays of this series together? You might want to gather symbols for each part of worship addressed in the series and add them to the altar one by one over the next seven weeks. Or you might want to print out large, beautiful letters to set up on the altar each week. Imagine having "GATHERING" spelled out on the altar or chancel with beautiful green and blue fabrics and candles surrounding it. Or you might want to plan a progressive altarscape that grows and changes throughout the series without using symbols or letters. There are so many options! The key is making the plan now that you can execute throughout the series with intention and purpose.

PREACHING NOTES

This first verse of our text for this week includes the word "again." That means that there is more to the story. The question before the preacher in cases like this is, how much of the story needs to be told to understand and experience all that is going on here? Do we need to go back to the first gathering of the soldiers or to the saga of the ark all along the way? Maybe we do, at least for ourselves, so that we have it in mind as we prepare and deliver the sermon on this day. But the larger truth here is that we might never know the whole story—either this one woven into the history books of the Hebrew scriptures or the ones that gather before us every time we come to worship. We know bits and pieces. We know, sometimes, highlights and lowlights. We know joys and pains, when we're allowed to. But we don't know every detail of the stories that are represented in our gatherings week by week.

We think we know David because we've told his story before. We know some of his highlights and we're aware of some of his lowlights (and will go back to some of them in this series), but do we know, really know, what's going on here? Why does David want to bring the ark to Jerusalem? Maybe it is to honor God, to bring God home to the place where God is known and worshiped. David loved the Lord and was known to write songs expressing that love, many of which are favorites of ours today. So, of course, David wanted God nearby, or at least this earthly manifestation of God's abiding presence among God's people.

But some argue that David had more personal motives behind this decision—that in this newly conquered city that was not yet called "the City of David," the new king needed something to establish his power, to make his mark on this city and these people. Maybe a little selfishness drove David to seek out this relic, this religious symbol, and bring it back home.

Can we be sure either way? No, and most likely it was a little of both. Can we take a poll of the motivations that brought your folks to worship this day? What all goes into the mix, even for those who come to lead, to sing and guide liturgy, and preach today? How pure are any of our motives? It is easy to be critical of kings like David, and indeed our expectations of them as leaders are rightly high. But mixed motives, selfishness or laziness or desire to please someone other than God, are often behind our choice to gather for worship almost any time we are here. Of course, we want to honor God; of course, we love to be in the house of the Lord; of course. But ...

What about when something goes wrong? The sound system doesn't work right, and the computer freezes up in the middle of the hymn and no one remembers the third verse. The piano goes out of tune, the altar flowers are dying, and no one noticed the horrific typo in the bulletin; and you feel as though might as well pack it in and go home. What then? Give up? David did. Well, ok, the problem was a tad more serious than a squealing microphone. But we won't know that unless we don't follow the lectionary's advice.

And as often happens, the lectionary hiccups around some verses that might prove to be a distraction. Do we let poor Uzzah be heard in the sanctuary today? I think I understand the decision of the framers of the lectionary. I don't agree with them, but I understand. It is a story too painful to tell. Too unfair? Unjust? Unlike the God we've come to know in Jesus? It is a story that doesn't have an easy explanation and can derail a comfortable worship experience.

In a small town attached to a big-city church I served, there was an Uzzah-like moment that threw us all off track. A police officer who was not a member of our church but was a member of the community and known to many in the church came one day after a preschooler hit the fire alarm at the church; he had to check, even though we called and said it was a false alarm. We walked through the building together and chatted about his job and mine. and I liked him a lot. A few days after that false alarm, he was off duty and was driving when he saw a car crash through a barrier and across a yard and into the front porch of a house near the church, ending up on its side with wheels spinning and oil leaking. The officer stopped his car and went to see if the driver and passenger were all right. When he leaned into the open window that was facing the sky, the driver pulled a gun and shot him twelve times.

He was only trying to help, to keep a disaster from becoming even worse. How is that fair? How is that just? When we gathered for worship after that incident, no one directly said to me that I should explain the goodness of God to them as we worshiped. But I felt it radiate from their wounded souls. I was afraid to tell them that I didn't have words that would explain such an event. I understood David putting the Ark at Obed-edom's house and walking away for three months. And I understand the lectionary crafters saying, "Let's just leave this one alone."

David comes back. And the parade starts again and goes six steps and stops. David brings it all to a halt and throws in an act of worship. Sometimes when there aren't explanations, worship is the best response. Then he went on and brought the Ark, brought God back home. And he danced. Stripped down, in his grief and in his joy, David danced. Mixed motives aside, he danced. Wholeheartedly, he danced. He danced, and sometimes he was alone; and other times, the city danced with him. They participated in the sacrifice and in the feast that followed. They rejoiced and shouted his name, no doubt, thanking him, crowning him, claiming him and the God who inspired him. Did they all look beyond the sight of the king stripped down and dancing and see the Spirit in tandem with him? Probably not. Just like, no matter what you pray before you preach, you aren't transparent, and you are seen.

Sometimes God is glimpsed in you and around you, preacher. But sometimes not. But keep dancing anyway. Keep pointing to the one whose music you hear. Those gathered will appreciate it and maybe – after a time – join in the dance with you.

But what about those who don't gather? There are those on the sidelines who keep to themselves. Who stands apart and above and doesn't like what they see? Michal didn't gather with them for worship that day. She stood apart and looked out and looked down, and "she despised him in her heart" (2 Samuel 6:16). She despised him. You can go on past the reading for this week to hear the argument in the royal suite, but it won't change the truth. There are those who won't gather, for lots of reasons, and those who come to hate what it is that we do when we worship together. It is unseemly; it is shameless in our modern era to carry on in such a fashion. "Surely," they declare, "we have progressed beyond this worship of an unseen God." Well, we can hate them in return and call them names and point fingers and warn folks away. Or we can just keep dancing. We can keep inviting, extending our hands even to those who refuse to gather, but just keep dancing. And gathering, mixed motives, incomplete stories, lack of answers and explanations, and all. And just keep dancing.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

When we witness our work bear good fruit and rejoice in all God has done among us...

we gather for worship.

When misunderstanding and misinformation threaten to divide instead of unite us...

we gather for worship.

When we dance together in the joy of knowing we belong to God and one another...

we gather for worship.

When we stumble and bumble our way forward as God's grace guides us into greater love and deeper communion...

we gather for worship. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Prayer for the Day

God of secret purposes and extravagant blessings,

we come to praise you.

We come because we want to,

we sing our songs because we are glad to,

we pray for your grace because we need to,
and we ask for the love of Christ in our hearts
because without it we are a dead loss.

Please lift every shutter within our mind,
and open every door within our soul,
that you, the Lord of glory,
the God of countless hosts, may come in.
Through Christ Jesus, the joy of loving hearts.
Amen!

Written by Bruce Prewer, <http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocB/BSUNDAY15.htm>. Used with permission of the author.

Prayer of Confession

Our hearts are hard, O God –
Soften them with your love.
Our hands are clenched, O God –
Open them with your grace.
Our feet are planted too firmly, O God –
Invite us to dance with you.
Our lives are not our own, we know –
Let us live and move and have our being in you, O God. Amen.

*Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, "Hold Fast to What Is Good,"
<https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession>. Used with permission.*

Benediction

Family of God, week in and week out, we gather for worship to support, to encourage, to learn, to confess, and to praise. These and more are the rhythms of our life with God and one another. Go now from this place blessed by grace to *keep dancing*. Keep dancing with the Triune God. Keep dancing with your neighbors. Keep dancing with all creation. Keep dancing in the love of God and for the love of God that your lives may be blessings to all you meet. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – Call to Worship

July 21, 2024

[2 Samuel 7:1-14a](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

Growing up in church, I considered the call to worship something of a mystery. Where other parts of the service were being done extemporaneously (like the pastoral prayer), here was something written down that everyone said together, but we weren't singing it. Unlike the Lord's Prayer, the call to worship changed every week. So, my child-brain would wonder, "Did Jesus tell us to do this, or is there a special holy book approved by The United Methodist Church where they get all of these, or do you have to have special training to know how to write a call to worship the right way?" In other words, "*Where do these words come from!?*"

Now, I'm grown and writing calls to worship, and I know exactly where the words come from. Mystery solved! And yet, as per usual, one mystery solved opens up a deeper, more intriguing mystery. What are we actually *doing* in the call to worship? Why do it at all? These are excellent questions for all of us who plan worship to ask from time to time, but they are also good questions to present to the whole congregation. Now, this doesn't have to look like opening your service with a conversation (though, if you want to, go for it!). Consider opening worship with a time of welcome that transitions people from gathering into the call to worship that calls everyone's attention to the *why* of the call to worship. You might want to emphasize the pedagogical aspects of the call to worship as it plants the seeds for what the gathered body will encounter throughout the service. Or you might want to emphasize the community building that happens in the call to worship as we join with one another in declaring our purpose in gathering for worship. However you approach it, invite the congregation to claim the purpose and intention of the call to worship for themselves this Sunday and every Sunday.

Visually, continue implementing the altar/chancel theme you began last week. Whether you spell out "CALL TO WORSHIP," add symbols for togetherness, or reference art and/or photographs that speak to your community's identity and history, fill the space with images that celebrate your community and the work the congregation does when they gather together. Consider, too, how you might reinforce these visuals with congregational song. This is a wonderful time to have a mini-hymn sing of some of your congregation's heart songs, especially the ones that speak to who you are as a community. Or you might want to introduce a new or not well-known hymn that you will feature over the next few weeks. It could be a hymn specifically about being the church, like "We Are the Church" or "The Church's One Foundation," or it might be a hymn that speaks to your values as a community, like "Draw the Circle Wide" or "Help Us Accept Each Other." Whether you lean into what the congregation knows or introduce something new or both, may this "call to worship" Sunday be a time when you reorient yourselves to your purpose in gathering as a community that worships the Triune God and is bound together by God as the Body of Christ.

PREACHING NOTES

David sits on the deck of his new wooden home. “No,” he thinks to himself, “that’s not right.” The king sits on the parapet of his new palace. Yeah, that’s better. He needs to get used to this new nomenclature. He’s not David the warrior any longer, not David the singer of songs and follower of sheep anymore. “No, the king,” he thinks with a sly smile of disbelief. The king who looks over one end of his balcony and sees the people, surprising in their specificity, beautiful in their particularity. His people, spread out before him, looking to him for guidance, looking to him to be king. It gives him strength, and it terrifies him at the same time. How could he possibly live into all he needs to be as king of his people?

His people. On the other end of his balcony, he looks into the gloom of the corner of the palace court and sees what might look like a homeless encampment—a tattered canvas lean-to, a flickering flame, the tributes and prayers written on all matter of material and left scattered about like an explosion of faithfulness and hope. But as cluttered as it appears, it is the true source of his strength. He should do something. So, he calls Nathan, that scruffy prophet of the Lord, to tell him that the king wants to do something for the Lord of Hosts, encamped in the corner of his backyard. Nathan nods along with David’s expansive description of the temple he plans to build to house the God who claimed and named him king. “Great idea, Davy,” Nathan concurs. David looks him in the eye and says, “Davy, Your Royal *Highness*, don’t forget.” Nathan smiles at their familiar joke and heads out to pray.

“Ever-present God,” and just that brings the prophet up short. “Ever present?” Suddenly, the king’s idea doesn’t seem so good. The voice of God speaks into Nathan’s praying and says, “Who asked for a new house? Was it me? I haven’t had a house since I brought these people from Egypt, from slavery, until this day. So, you tell Davy, I brought him from behind the sheep to be in front of the people. I did that. I know he thinks he did. He gets me and him confused sometimes. But tell him he won’t build me a house, but that I will make a house out of him. Tell him that, prophet.”

So, Nathan turned around to go tell David the bad news. Or good news. He wasn’t sure how the king would take it, to be honest. He didn’t fly off the handle like the previous royal did. But he was a passionate soul, this musician king. This shepherd boy now ruler of God’s people. Many people look at him and are amazed at what he has done in his life, what he has made of himself. Except ... did he make himself? Nathan’s steps back to tell the king the news sped up a little bit. The prophet had a way to present the Word from the Lord. He would invite the king to join in a call to worship.

I’m sorry, what? Out of all the elements of worship, who pays attention to the call to worship? Isn’t it really just like the ringing of the bell before class starts or the whistle before the train trundles through the crossing? The referee’s whistle at the beginning of the game, the teacher rapping her ruler on the desk. It is just noise, just words or music that says, “Hey, be quiet; it’s time to start.” Well, yes, it is true that the call to worship has an attention-getting function. But no, there is so much more going on in those words that we say or songs that we sing.

When we gather for worship, as we discussed last week, we gather with our multitude of stories and experiences and particularities. We gather with our certainties and our doubts, with our faith and our questions, with our hopes and our fears. This is the wholeness, as messy as it is, in which we gather. When we are called into worship, we are invited into a new perspective, a new way of seeing and being in the world. It’s not that we leave all with which we gathered aside, ready to be picked up again when

we leave the worship experience. We don't leave anything aside when we come to worship. But we are called into this new (or renewed) way of seeing ourselves and our connections with God and with the wider community as we worship. We are invited into a relationship of support and acceptance, and worship is the arena where we experience this first.

David wanted to do something for God; he wanted to build God a house and thereby declare this city, Jerusalem, as the spiritual as well as the political heart of Israel. This sounds like a good thing, to be honest, and you can't help but wonder why God was against it. We could focus on the timing issue. God wanted a house, a temple, but says that David isn't the one who will build it. But there are also hints that David liked to do things that made himself look good. Like all of us, his motives were somewhat mixed here, and what he was doing, at least in part, was cementing his place at the top of this nation. Notice that God doesn't say, through Nathan, a simple no, or even a not yet. What God says is, "Look at it from my perspective. What have I been doing and what will I do with my people?" God invites David to shift his perspective and move from the center so that God can occupy that space in David's life and planning and in the life and planning of the people of God.

Worship is the place where we remember, some say, that God is in charge. That's true, but it is God's vision, God's way of seeing the world that guides us in living out our lives. When we gather, we are called into a new way of being, and worship is the best description we have of what it means to live as God's people. Let us hear the call and live our worship.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Welcome! Welcome to the baggage we carry, the joys we share, the griefs we bear, and the worries we hold.

Come! Let us worship!

The voice of God is calling us to come with all that we are and all that we carry to worship.

Come! Let us worship!

God calls us to gather, to receive grace in our gathering, and to reorient us again to the ways of God.

Come! Let us worship!

So, come, members of the family of God! Bring all that you are to be molded by grace, refocused toward Love, and woven together as community in Christ.

Come! Let us worship! Thanks be to God. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Prayer for the Day

Equip us, God, for the work of ministry. For the work involved with building unity of purpose and vision. Equip us with saints who will say yes to your will and yes to your way. Equip us, God, to journey with Jesus through life's uncertain paths. Equip us, God, with maturity that comes from knowing you. Equip us, God, to speak the truth in love even when it's uncomfortable. Equip us to move beyond a childish faith that whines for more while giving less. Equip us, O God, for the work of ministry that you have called us to do. Amen.

Written by Kwasi I. Kena, The Africana Worship Book, Year B (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), 136.

Prayer of Confession

(in unison)

Have mercy us on, O God, according to your steadfast love. For we know our sins which are always in front of our eyes. We have not loved you as deeply as our own heartbeat. We have failed to care for your body and for the whole of creation. Forgive us. According to your abundant mercy, blot out our transgressions and cleanse us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and sustain in us a willing spirit. Free us to know joy and gladness and to live our days in praise.

Written by Valerie Bridgeman Davis, The Africana Worship Book, Year B (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), 157.

Benediction

Beloved, listen! God calls us to worship in our gathering *and* in our scattering. May the Triune God bless you as you go from this place to answer God's call to worship in everything you do in thought, word, and deed that you may be a blessing of love, hope, and peace to all you meet. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – Call to Confession

July 28, 2024

[2 Samuel 11:1-15](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

For those who have cycled through Years A, B, and C of the lectionary a time or two, you probably knew this text was coming. For many, it is one of the most uncomfortable texts in the Bible. How do we reconcile that David, the man after God's own heart, and David, the sexual abuser and murderer, are the same person? And even if we are willing to face the difficulties of this text head-on, how do we even begin to build a worship service around it? Do we keep the tone somber? Do we overwhelm the senses with the weight of our capacity to sin? Do we pretend that David is just a single extreme case, that his sins are on another level than any of us could ever commit?

Honestly, none of those approaches sound like good options. In reality, David is *not* a singular case of particularly terrible sin. Sin is sin. It just so happens that David's sins were written down and laid bare for all of us to read. So, we want to invite you not to approach this service with a particularly somber tone or to weigh down the congregation with the terribleness of human sin. Rather, we invite you to approach David's sin as an invitation to lay our individual and communal sins bare before God by giving particular attention to the call to confession.

If your community regularly incorporates a call to confession into the liturgy, consider shaping the prayer of confession to allow space for individuals to silently lay themselves bare before God in the specificity of how they have each fallen short before concluding with a time of communal confession. If your community does not regularly incorporate a call to confession outside of the Communion liturgy, find a communal prayer of confession that the whole community can pray together that is different from what the community usually experiences as part of Holy Communion. We encourage you to use a prayer that uses modern language and addresses modern struggles with sin as a way of introducing your community to what confession can look, feel, and sound like outside of the liturgical context in which they usually experience it.

As you continue building the altar/chancel visuals, you might choose to go a little more minimal this week than other weeks but don't feel like this week must be markedly more subdued than other weeks. If you've chosen vibrant greens or blues or other colors to include on the altar the last two weeks, do it again this week! If you're spelling out the theme of the week in bright colors, do that this week too! The key is, don't let this week stop the flow of what you have planned because confession is part of the flow of our worship gatherings. In this way, the visuals—and music!—can help the congregation experience the call to confession as a common, necessary, and beautiful act of worship we engage in as the gathered Body of Christ.

PREACHING NOTES

You know that face your mom used to give you when you did something disappointing? That's the face the writer of 2 Samuel 11 has as the first verse is written. It practically drips off the page: "But David remained at Jerusalem." Ouch. Kings are supposed to go out to battle. That's how the verse begins. "But David remained at Jerusalem." You know it isn't going to be good with an introduction like that. And it isn't. It is about as far from good as it can get. Some argue that this is the beginning of the end of David. This event, this abuse of power, is where David's decline was launched. There was bad decision after bad decision following this dalliance on the roof of the palace. The king, who is still held out as the pinnacle of the royal experiment, is revealed to be as human, as much of a sinner in need of redemption as any of us.

There have been attempts throughout history to exonerate David by laying the blame at the feet of Bathsheba. She was simply too beautiful, too available, too accessible, and visible to resist. David was helpless before her power. Those arguments have the feel of those who blame rape victims today who supposedly brought on their attack because of their mode of dress or behaviors. It is clear where the power is here. The writer is careful to explain Bathsheba's behavior. It is David's behavior that is being challenged here.

When Bathsheba sent word to the king that she was pregnant, the king continued his sinfulness. Continued? Expanded, compounded, made impossibly worse. First, he tries to cover up this wanton act, and when that doesn't work, he plots murder against an innocent man, a faithful, patriotic man who honored his king and his country, while defending the purity of his wife. So honorable is this man that his name is preserved in the genealogy of Jesus that Matthew records. The offense against Bathsheba and Uriah is laid bare for all to see. Is it redeemed by the relationship with the Messiah who came to redeem the world? Redeemed? Hard to say. It depends on what you mean by redeemed. Erased? No, not in the least.

What do we do with this story? We could, and in this election year maybe should, proclaim warnings about the abuse of power. Remind hearers that no one is exempt or immune from bad behavior. But even that seems too volatile for these days in which we live. Too pointed or too political. Yet, here we are, in second Samuel, reliving a story that makes us all uncomfortable. We don't even get the rest of the story until next week. So, what *are* we to do with this story?

We return to worship, and we hear a call to confession. No one particularly likes the prayer of confession in worship, admittedly. Most of us who lead worship have been asked, sometimes directly sometimes more indirectly, if it would be possible to just skip it most of the time. "We're good people," we think. The prayer sometimes has us saying things that we feel aren't true. "We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, and we have not heard the cry of the needy" ("Confession and Pardon," *United Methodist Hymnal*, 8). Isn't that a bit much? We are a loving community; we pay attention to and are engaged in missions with the needy. Why do we need to beat our chest and claim that we are not doing this when we are? Worship is supposed to be a happy experience; I am supposed to feel better about myself when I come out of worship, not worse. Let's just skip over the whole confession thing.

Except. We do gather each week with regrets. Maybe not on David's scale; we haven't arranged a murder to cover up an adulterous affair. But we have, on occasion, wounded those we love with unkind

words or hurtful acts. We have walked or driven past someone seeking something from us and pretended we didn't see them, when, in fact, we did, but we have felt helpless in the face of the systems of poverty in our hometowns. We come carrying burdens that sometimes feel overwhelming to us, and when all we do is set them aside while we sing praises to God, we walk away with those same burdens, same guilt, same sin. That is why we need confession. Even when the words of the corporate prayer don't quite mirror our personal experience, there is space to offer our own prayers.

When we bring our whole selves to worship, a lot comes along with us. Like David, there are questions about how we use our power, even if we don't think we have any. There is the fear of being caught out that sometimes haunts our every step, our every decision. There are, we have been taught to say, things done and things left undone that weigh on us. Here is where we can offer all that up to the God who loves us. Here is where we can find absolution, forgiveness, and blessing that allows us to start over again and seek to be who we want to be, who God calls us to be. So, let us hear the call to confession as we worship.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, you are welcome here. All of who you are—even your regrets and failings—is welcome here.

We come to tell the truth about who we are in relationship with God.

Many of us find it easy to recognize our goodness and difficult to notice our sins.

We come to tell the truth about who we are in relationship with God.

Others of us live under a shroud of guilt and shame, believing we can never be good enough to receive the fullness of God's love.

We come to tell the truth about who we are in relationship with God.

However you enter this place, know this: you are loved, accepted, and called. May God's love draw us to honest confession; God's acceptance assures us of the work of grace in our lives, and God's call compels us to live in grace.

We come to tell the truth about who we are in relationship with God who loves us, accepts us, and calls us. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Prayer for the Day

Holy God, joy of the universe,

it is your awesome love that brings us here.

You awaken within us a loving response,
which hungers and thirsts for your truth and beauty.

As we worship you,
please do not give us the blessings
we want but the ones we most need.
Satisfy us with the truth that we may need,
though such truth might be most uncomfortable,
and confront us with your holy beauty,
that brings us healing.

Through Christ Jesus your joyful Son.

Amen!

Adapted from Bruce Prewer, <http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocB/BSUNDAY17.htm>. Used with permission of the author.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we hear the story of David and wonder how he could so abuse his power—serving his own interests in such a selfish way. How different from the way Jesus used his power—serving, healing, and nurturing others.

Forgive us when our actions reflect those of David more than those of Jesus.

The account of David shows someone yielding to temptation by feeding his own particular hunger with disastrous results, whilst Jesus took time to feed the crowds with miraculous results.

Forgive us the times when we have yielded to the temptation of feeding our own interests to the detriment of others around us.

David demonstrated how things can get out of control when God's rules are not followed, while Jesus demonstrates how God's power can bring peace even into the stormiest situations.

We confess that the way of the world does reflect more the way of David than the way of Jesus, and we pray that we may be powerfully strengthened by the Holy Spirit to witness to Jesus' love and compassion in and through all we do and say. This we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen**

Assurance of Forgiveness

Through the power of the Holy Spirit within us, God is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. So, hear and believe the good news that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Written by Moira Laidlaw, on Liturgies Online at <http://www.liturgiesonline.com.au/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/07/confession-proper-12-b.html>.

Benediction

Beloved, receive this good news: Nothing can separate you from the love of God. May you go now in the blessing of God who forgives our sins and empowers us to turn once again to be and become who God calls us to be. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – The Weight of the Word

August 4, 2024

[2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

Few stories highlight the power and responsibility of preaching like Nathan's confrontation with David. This can certainly be a day for pulling back the curtain and speaking directly with the congregation about preaching. How do you prepare? What preaching wisdom shapes your approach to crafting and delivering a sermon? How do you understand the role of preaching in the wider context of worship?

That said, this week is about more than the preacher and preaching. It is about the Word of God for the people of God. While the preacher helps open up the Word, proclamation can happen in many modes during worship. Consider how you might invite the congregation to share in the proclamation of the Word by singing scripture, offering a testimony, or responsively reading a psalm. Perhaps you might recruit some congregants with a gift for theater to act out the encounter between Nathan and David to help the congregation experience the story anew. You might also consider making the preaching more conversational this Sunday. Perhaps invite a couple of laypeople to reflect on a couple of questions and come up to talk with the preacher during the sermon. Consider asking those gathered to think about some questions; then invite them to discuss the questions with one another in the pews. Whatever you choose, find ways to emphasize that the weight of the Word calls for everyone to listen and participate, not just the preacher!

Consider, too, how your visuals and liturgy might emphasize the Word. Perhaps invite congregants to bring their family Bibles to place on the altar or go find Bibles throughout the church to display—everything from a children's Bible storybook to a youth Bible to a large altar Bible. Think about including a blessing of the Bibles that are on the altar and in the space as a way to ritually emphasize the power of the Word and the ways scripture opens us to receive the transforming, life-giving Word of God. It is important to draw the congregation's attention to the difference between the Word and the words in the Bible. The scriptures are not God. When we proclaim and receive the Word—whether sung or read or preached or acted out—we encounter God *through* the stories, wisdom, psalms, and teachings in the Bible. When we hold the weight of the Word together in worship, we grow together in love of God and neighbor as the Word encourages, challenges, edifies, and instructs us as the gathered Body of Christ.

PREACHING NOTES

The rest of the story. Well, some of the rest of the story. You would need to keep reading chapter 12 and then the whole rest of David's story to get an idea of the impact of this event on his time as king of the people of God. And you can keep reading to find out the impact of this event on Bathsheba. But you won't find anything. We know nothing from the text of Bathsheba's motivations or interpretations. She is kept silent throughout the telling of the story. Even the historical record labels her as "the wife of Uriah" and not a person in her own right. Some might argue that this is to keep David's sin before us, but it makes Bathsheba a pawn in the whole sordid game. As Cameron Howard, Old Testament Professor at Luther Seminary in Minnesota puts it,

“Apart from verse 3, where the woman’s identity is reported to David, the narrative refers to Bathsheba only as “the wife of Uriah.” This rhetorical choice emphasizes David’s culpability as an adulterer, even as it serves to downplay Bathsheba’s own personhood.”

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-11-3/commentary-on-2-samuel-1126-1210-13-15-3>)

And why does this matter? It is probably beyond the ability of any preacher to redeem this story and reclaim Bathsheba’s identity, given the lack of information we have. But to draw attention to this could resonate with members of the congregation who are feeling similarly overlooked and victims to a patriarchal system that consistently overlooks the role of women in our society. It might also be something of an antidote to centuries of speculation and blaming that has painted Bathsheba as somehow responsible for all that happened to her.

We examined the details last week when we acknowledged the place of confession in our worship experience. Our text begins this week with a woman weeping and an angry God. So, God does what an angry God does and sends a preacher. Nathan uses an effective homiletical device and tells a story. He tells the story well, and David is caught up in it. David is led to see the injustice and abuse of power in the tale of the little lamb, even when he can overlook it in his own life and actions.

This is the power of the proclaimed word in worship. When done well, it doesn’t merely explain a biblical text; instead, it can open us up to a new way of seeing ourselves and the world around us and, perhaps most importantly, seeing ourselves in the world. Preaching is about making connections, about building relationships, and about weaving our story and the gospel story together in transforming, disciple-making ways. And sometimes preaching is about calling to account. It is hard to imagine Nathan relishing approaching the king with this word. Just as any preacher who is also a pastor and has walked with people through struggles and joys alike would be hard-pressed to bring a hard word to the people.

Of course, the kind of message that Nathan brought isn’t appropriate for the pulpit. It is more of an individual challenge. We aren’t trying to suggest that preaching is how we call individuals to task for their behaviors or choices. And yet, there is a weight to God’s word at times that we cannot deny. Preaching calls for transformation, and change is always hard. Even when it is change that we want, or think we want, anyway. It is still change. There is a built-in resistance to change, and it is a hard word to hear.

David’s response to Nathan’s sermon might give some insight into what it means when he is called a man after God’s heart. Despite his behavior throughout this sordid event, he is willing to see the innate sinfulness of it all. It is as if he is the prodigal who has finally come to himself in this moment, and he sees more clearly what he has done. Reading on in the chapter, we see that there are consequences to come and innocents to suffer from this. We can wrestle with the fairness of the child paying for the sin of the father; it seems the opposite of the theology that Jesus calls us to hold. But that there is fallout from our actions is evident and overwhelming. Children often suffer from the actions of the adults around them. The call, then, is to be aware of our interrelatedness and understand that what we do can never be completely harm-free, despite what our “common wisdom” might tell us. In the real world, there is really no such thing as a victimless crime.

So, let the word speak to God’s people this week, as it does every week. Let the proclamation be one of transformation, repentance, and restitution. Let there be a challenge to all to not abuse their power,

their position, their authority. And let us hold our leaders to a high standard in life and official capacity. Let us see all the people who might be impacted by our choices and our preferences. Let us hear the weight of the word that tears down and builds up in equal measure.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Family of God, what is our story?

We are part of God's good creation, created and sustained by the Triune God.

Family of God, what is our story?

Though created by our loving God, we have sinned and harmed ourselves, one another, and creation.

Family of God, what is our story?

While we were yet sinners, God sent Jesus to show us how to turn away from sin and toward the love of God.

Family of God, what is our story?

We carry the weight of the Word in our hearts, our hands, and our voices, proclaiming with our lives the good news of God's love and the mercy of God's grace.

Family of God, this is our story and our song!

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Prayer for the Day

*One body, one Spirit, one hope,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is above all and through all and in all,
take this patchwork collection of persons
and quilt together your church.
Like old pieces of cloth,
take these words and songs and prayers,
take our thoughts and inner hungers,*

and join them all together into a new and living fabric—
the purpose of which is to cover and color your world
(or at least our corner of it)
with grace and love. In Christ. Amen.

Posted on the Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren website. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/07/opening-prayer-one-in-christ.html>.

Prayer of Confession

(in unison)

Continue, O Lord, to extend your grace and mercy to us, your unworthy servants.

We have failed you because you depended on us to be your witnesses, but we were too embarrassed to testify about your faithfulness. We were too busy to speak a word in your name. We are neither anxious nor ready to sit and reflect deeply on Holy Scriptures. Good Lord, extend your grace and mercy as we ask your forgiveness. In order to receive your forgiveness, we know that we need to forgive everyone who has offended us. Help us to hold nothing against anyone, for that may jeopardize our gift of forgiveness from you. Set us free to live fully in you, and to love all unreservedly. We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Written by T. Anne Daniel, The Africana Worship Book, Year B (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), 158.

Benediction

Beloved, may God bless you as you go from this place carrying the Word in your hearts, living the story we share with the saints of old and the saints of now as we break down barriers to community and build up the kin-dom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2024.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – Prayers of the People

August 11, 2024

[2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

If you're breathing a sigh of relief now that we've moved past 2 Samuel 11 and 12, think again. Just a few chapters later, David is embroiled in a family drama that has escalated to a violent war against his son, Absalom. Despite Absalom's attempts to usurp the throne, David responds to his death not as a victorious king but as a heartbroken father. The complicated nature of this episode in David's story calls our attention to the prayers of the people as our response to God's Word and to one another.

In particular, the prayers of the people invite us to respond to the complicated and often unknown challenges facing our neighbors in the pews, down the street, and around the world. Few simple solutions exist to the complex problems that plague our lives, whether we're talking about war among nations, conflicts within families, or battles being waged in individual hearts. Whether our neighborhoods are hungry for food, a living wage, or unconditional love, we must grapple with the problems. And yet, no matter the enormity of the challenges we face, grace abounds again and again. The prayers of the people remind us that when we don't know what to do or we are afraid to acknowledge the suffering around us, we begin with prayer; and not just individual prayer—*corporate* prayer. We don't have to know the details of our neighbors' struggles to gather together and offer one another grace through prayer.

If your community is not accustomed to sharing joys and concerns with one another in worship, consider this Sunday an opportunity to teach and experiment with inviting congregants to offer petitions during worship followed by a response like, "God, in your mercy, hear our prayer." You might invite community partners to tell you specific concerns they would like the church to pray for and incorporate those into the prayers of the people, focusing the church's intercessions toward the challenges that are happening in the neighborhood. Consider, too, how your visuals might help your congregation notice where grace is at work in the community. Perhaps you can bring in local flowers and plants, art made by a children's group inside the church or in the neighborhood, or school supplies the church is gathering for a local school. Reference the items on the altar during the preaching and/or the prayers as physical touchpoints to the community outside the church's walls, the neighbors to whom the church offers grace through prayer. These ordinary items can then help congregants remember the importance of the prayers of the people every time they see a petunia, a coloring page, or a box of pencils, extending the grace we offer through prayer in worship into the other six days of the week.

PREACHING NOTES

One of the reasons many of us avoid texts like this is that there is simply too much back story to fill in. How far back into Second Samuel do we need to go to understand what is going on with Absalom? Do we need to go back to chapter 13 to recount the sordid details of Absalom and brother Ammon and sister Tamar to get some idea of what is going on here? Do we need to present David as the one who failed his offspring or Absalom and his immediate sense of justice to explain something of the tension

that existed between Absalom and David? It might help us understand our text for this week a little better.

Perhaps telling Absalom's story would bring some wisdom to the proclamation this week. His rakish charm and cleverness bordering on lawlessness, giving Absalom a Captain Jack Sparrow sort of appeal, might explain how he has become a threat to his father's reign as king of Israel. Go ahead, read chapters 13 through 18 and get a glimpse of who this prince really was. A hero? A villain? A rogue or heartthrob? All the above? Capture him in your mind and then decide just how much of the story you need to tell to make sense of this text, to give the hearers an idea of what was going on.

On the other hand, what do we really need to know to proclaim this message? This is not to excuse the preacher from doing the homework that enables proclamation to take place. You should be acquainted with the story in all its complicated details. But does the sermon itself need a history lesson of the royal family to speak of the messiness of family and the machinations of blood relations?

When we gather as God's people for worship, our faces turn toward God. Our worship is an offering of selves, of words, of actions, of commitments, of confession and repentance, but all to God. God is the audience of our worship. But we also turn our gaze outward toward the created world, toward the people around us, and we lift up prayers for healing and hope, for transformation and grace. We ask God to intervene in situations we barely understand or with people we don't know. Yet our prayers are earnest and faith-filled. We even offer ourselves as signs of God's presence, God's healing grace, and redemptive presence in the lives of those around us and the wider world. We call these prayers "the prayers of the people." Sometimes we speak of intercession - prayers or actions on behalf of another. We care even without the history, even without the detail. Asking for prayer within the body doesn't mean sharing everything. It is an invitation to exhibit grace for and with one another and with the world around us. We don't need to stand in judgment over those who may have made bad choices, who may have come from dysfunctional families. We can extend grace and provide space for healing and for transformation to take place in safety.

David's anguish over the fate of his son is genuine, even though this son had opposed him as king. Even though the family had been torn apart by behaviors and selfishness and raging egos, David still wanted to love his wayward son. He wanted to love him into a new way of being in the world. Now it was too late. Perhaps a part of David's pain was realizing how he had failed his son. What parent doesn't face such a loss without feeling somehow responsible for all that happened? As a preacher, you stand before families who might not have such epic levels of dysfunction but are nonetheless covering wounds of which you might have only an inkling. In telling the story in our text for this week, we can bring a measure of hope to those who may have felt like all is lost—not that there are solutions that can come from the pulpit. That is a matter for counselors and a lot of intense work on family dynamics. But there can come an offer of grace; there can be an invitation to lead with love, maybe even a call to hold on ... to one another or to hope or to the God who loves us like a parent and whose heart breaks when we hurt.

Let our prayers – and our preaching – be a true intercession— prayers of the people who cry out to God and cling to hope.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

We gather today knowing there are people in our world who are surrounded by violence and conflict on every side.

Our work of peace begins with prayer.

We gather today knowing there are people in our community who feel lost, alone, abandoned, and forgotten.

Our work of love begins with prayer.

We gather today knowing there are people in this place, this neighborhood, this world that we all share who experience overwhelming grief, despair, and sorrow.

Our work of hope begins with prayer.

We gather not to look away from the world but to witness the needs of our neighbors through the lens of God's love.

May we be a people who pray and, out of our praying, do the work of bringing peace, love, and hope to all we encounter. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Prayers of the People

Begin by inviting the congregation to sing "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" (The Faith We Sing, 2193). This hymn will serve as the response after every petition. The musicians may choose to either play the piano underneath the petitions or play a short introduction to before each sung response.

Loving God, who watches over us like a parent, delighting in our happiness and weeping over all the ways we harm one another, guide us. Nurture us. Empower us to be your peacemakers and mercy-bringers in this world.

"Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" (TFWS 2193)

Merciful God, our world is full of war, violence, injustice, and oppression. We are surrounded on all sides by misinformation, half-truths, and lies. Give us courage to tell the truth of your love, to protect the innocent, and to resist evil in every way it presents itself.

"Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" (TFWS 2193)

Gracious God, our neighborhoods are full of people who are struggling. Struggling to make ends meet, struggling to find stability, struggling to find community. Empower us to notice, to reach out, and to love our neighbors as you have called us to love.

"Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" (TFWS 2193)

God of Hope, our lives are filled with so many reasons for despair. Loneliness abounds, uncertainty overwhelms, and suffering feels constant. Fill us with the warmth of your love and inspire us to extend a hand, a hug, a smile, a gesture of connection in a disconnected world.

“Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (TFWS 2193)

In the name of the Triune God who gives, receives, and extends Love to all...Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Prayer of Confession

O God of compassion,
if you kept a record of our sins,
who could stand?
We come before you with our brokenness
and our wounds for all to see.
We bring our anger, our bitterness,
our unwholesome talk,
and our deceitfulness.
We try to do good,
but sometimes fail.
We choose to do evil,
and sometimes succeed.
Keep your promise to forgive us
when we confess to you completely.
Without you, we have no hope.

Words of Assurance

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and will forgive us.
God provides freely, in the bread of heaven,
all the mercy we need for life everlasting.
The good news is forgiveness in the name of Christ Jesus.

Adapted from *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2009*, © 2008 Abingdon Press. Posted on the Ministry Matters website, <http://www.ministrymatters.com/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/07/confession-proper-14-b.html>.

Benediction

Beloved, may God’s grace open your hearts to recognize the needs of your neighbors; may God’s mercy fill your prayers, and may God’s peace empower you to share the goodness and blessing you receive from God with all. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Benediction

August 18, 2024

[1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

“Ask what I should give you” (3:5). Notice that God doesn’t ask Solomon a question. God commands Solomon to ask. We often end up focusing on the wisdom Solomon requests, but what if we began with God’s command? What might God’s command and Solomon’s response tell us about benediction?

There are times that the benediction can feel a bit like a moment to re-summarize the sermon, to leave the congregation with the main point we want them to remember just in case they didn’t catch it the first time. We certainly want the sermon and the benediction to be connected. Yet, I wonder if rehashing the main point of the sermon actually accomplishes the purpose of a benediction, which is to bless. In some way, the benediction is our weekly answer to God’s command, “Ask what I should give you.” In the benediction, we dare to join as a community to ask for God’s blessing. Not just understanding or help. *Blessing*. And more specifically, a blessing that extends the work we rehearse in worship into our daily lives.

If benediction is our answer to God’s command to ask, then Solomon’s response demonstrates the importance of answering God’s command according to what God values. God did not guarantee that Solomon would receive whatever he asked for. What we ask for matters, not because God will condemn us for asking the wrong thing, but because when we ask God for blessing, we are participating in an ongoing conversation and work of grace with God and one another. Will our benediction extend or resist the work of grace in our communal life together?

In a children’s worship arts group I assist with, sometimes we ask the kids to bless one another at the end by doing a communal benediction that goes something like this:

Leader: What good things do you want God to do for one another and the world? After each answer, we will all say “Yes!” together.

Kid 1: Good sleep!

Everyone: YES!

Kid 2: No fighting anywhere!

Everyone: YES!

Kid 3: A good day at school!

Everyone: YES!

Leader: In all things, God bless us!

Everyone: YES! Amen!

However you decide to approach the focus on benediction this week, consider this: how might our approach to communal blessing change if we understood it as saying “yes!” to all the good that God wants for us?

PREACHING NOTES

After five weeks of David, we turn to his son and successor, Solomon. After five weeks of questionable antics and behaviors, we get two weeks of prayers. We move from the one called “a man after God’s heart” to the wise one. How do wisdom and passion for living and for worship work together? Maybe we’re supposed to see something in the combination, the head and the heart, as a pointer to a whole-bodied expression of faith and commitment to God.

Sounding loud and clear from all these texts is that God is not looking for perfect people to step up and lead. That David was a work in progress is undeniable; even late in his life, he was struggling with flaws and foibles that constantly got in his way. Now we have Solomon, and surely, he has learned from the weaknesses of his father. But he too is flawed. He too hedges his bets. Did you notice the “only” in our text this week?

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places (1 Kings 3:3 NRSV).

He loved the lord, we’re told, only ... Only what? Only he snuck out to the high places and burned a little incense and left a sacrifice now and then. He was just covering his bases. Just a little contingency gesture. Is that harsh? Perhaps, but it is clear that the writers of 1 Kings disapprove of this action. It is a flaw in his character. Back in Deuteronomy, it was declared that when God brings the people out, they are to worship in the place that God declares, the place where God will reside (Deut. 12:5). So, to pay attention to the Canaanite holy places is to ... fudge a bit on this rule. Plus, the writers are laboring under the assumption that having kings at all is a risky proposition. So, it doesn’t bother them that Solomon isn’t perfect. And it shouldn’t bother us. God can use any of us, as inept, as uncertain, as wavering as we are.

In fact, and this is a mind-blowing note here in this text, it is at Gibeon where the Lord appears to Solomon. It’s only a few verses after the wagging of the finger at Solomon for even being there; and the next thing you know, God shows up. And God makes one of those “chance of a lifetime” offers. “Ask what I should give you” (1 Kings 3:5). Was that a test? If Solomon asked for something trivial, or something selfish or destructive, would God have said, “Sorry, no”? Or was it one of those things where the omniscient God knew what Solomon would ask for, so there wasn’t really a risk in making the offer? We can’t really know, but if Solomon wasn’t really free to be selfish and greedy, then what’s the risk? And why does God seem surprised and pleased with how Solomon did respond to the offer?

For what did he ask, this king that the text seems to indicate had his own blind spots? And how did he ask? That is always the question behind our reading. An audio version of the Bible would be so helpful—not one read by actors or performers putting meaning after the fact, but a genuine recording of this very conversation, if such a thing had been possible. Then we would know whether Solomon is cool and calculating, assured of what would both please God and be most beneficial to Solomon’s reign and or his legacy. “Wisdom,” he breathes. “Give me wisdom so that I can make the right choices so that I can lead

with confidence and power.” Or was it rather an anxious act born of his awareness of the failings of his beloved father and his twisted history and the fears that he wasn’t up to the task? Was this a George Bailey prayer half drunk on fear and desperation, muttered behind his hand in Martini’s Bar before the angel Clarence shows up? “Show me the way,” he mumbles, hoping no one else hears. “Show me the way,” which the writers of 1 Kings then interpret to be, “Give me wisdom.” In Solomon’s wonderful life, then, wisdom is his angel. Who knows?

Maybe we’re reading too much into this conversation between God and Solomon, this very personal prayer of blessing and presence. So, let’s step back a moment and see what is happening here. What has God pronounced over Solomon in this encounter? Continuing with our theme of “Worship with Rejoicing,” this has all the marks of a benediction. God invites Solomon to walk in God’s ways as he leaves from this moment. There is a blessing imparted and a charge given. When we gather for worship, we need a good word (*bene dictio*) to go with us as we depart. We need something that will go with us, something that will enable us to hold on to the wisdom we have heard and shared. We need something that will inspire us to continue in the same spirit we received and offered during worship. The benediction is a reminder that worship never really ends. The service might be over, but the worship goes on as we continue living as a witness to God at work in our lives. A benediction, then, is not a period at the end of our worship sentence, but a comma connecting us to whatever comes next. For Solomon heard the call to walk in God’s ways, keeping the statutes and commandments as well as (or maybe better than?) his father David did. When we leave our places of worship, we go out to walk in those ways too. May we hear the blessing in our going out.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Disciples of Christ, have you come today to receive a good word?

Yes! We come to receive a good word and blessing to carry with us into the world.

God blessed Solomon in a dream. Are you ready to dream?

Yes! We come to dream of God’s blessings we will carry with us into the world.

God blesses us when we worship together. Are you ready to worship?

Yes! We come to worship God together as we share in the good word of God’s grace.

Then, come! Let us worship with rejoicing!

Praise be to God who gives us wisdom and draws us together as the family of God! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Prayer for the Day

O God of Consistency, how good it is to hear your Word. How good it is to experience your Word for ourselves! For you are a God who keeps your Word! Close-up God, you sent us Jesus to show us how to match our words with our actions. For Jesus, there could be no “God bless you” without providing actual blessings. For Jesus, there could be no lip service to inclusiveness, but his ministry was to the poor and rich, to the Jew and to the Gentile, to the righteous and to the unrighteous, to the young and to the old, to men and to women. We continue to be honored by the grace that poured from Jesus’ lips and his actions.

This Sunday we want to work to be consistent. We want to work to shed that “other face” and just show “one face” to the world. Teach us how to be consistent in all that we say and do. Deliver us from “nice-nastiness.” Take these earthen vessels we call our lives and make us “doers” of your Word. Just as we depend on you, God, let others be able to depend on us. Put in us the desire to be *real*. Make us “Examples of Your Word.” In the name of the One who embraced us and showed us how to embrace the unembraceable, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Written by Sherrie Dobbs Johnson, The Africana Worship Book, Year B (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), 138.

Prayer of Confession

**You must shake your head in wonder at our ways,
Keeper of the Covenant.**

**How can we say we want wisdom,
when we foolishly squander the knowledge we have of your ways?**

**How can we claim to follow you,
when we walk the slippery roads of the world
not caring where they lead us?**

**How can we desire your great and steadfast love,
when the simple seductions of our society are in full view every day?**

**How can you have mercy on such unwise and unfaithful people,
Perfect Wisdom?**

**Yet, that is exactly what you do:
and our greed turns to gratitude,
our pettiness to praise,
our tantrums to thanksgiving,**

as hope and joy become our blessing
through the One we call our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Silent Prayers may be offered.

Assurance of Pardon

In Christ, God sent redemption for all.
In Christ, God feeds our hungry souls.
In Christ, God gives the cup of salvation
to thirsty people.
**We give thanks to God for everything:
forgiveness, hope, new life. Amen.**

*Written by Thom Shuman and posted on Lectionary Liturgies, <http://lectionarylitanies.blogspot.ca/>.
Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/07/confession-proper-15-b.html>.*

Benediction

Beloved of God, go from this place blessed with:

Peace!

Yes!

Joy!

Yes!

Wisdom!

Yes!

And grace to share with all!

Yes! Thanks be to God. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Sent Out to Live

August 25, 2024

[1 Kings 8:\(1,6,10-11\), 22-30, 41-43](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

If you got to last week and thought that must be the last week of this series since it focused on benediction—SURPRISE! The benediction isn't the end of worship—nor is it the end of this series—because worship does not end when the gathered Body of Christ disperses. We are sent out from worship to continue worshiping God, practicing all that we have learned and rehearsed together in gathered worship in the everyday, ordinary moments of our lives.

Solomon's prayer in today's text emphasizes that the God who cannot be contained has come to dwell among God's people. We do not just visit God in our places of worship. God dwells all around us. *God lives in the neighborhood with us.* We worship with our lives not because God is always watching but because worship is how we love God and neighbor, and, therefore, learn how to love our neighbors as ourselves. So, as you plan worship this week, consider how you might call your congregation to recognize God's presence in the neighborhood. Introduce a prayer practice they can use this week when they water the lawn or take a walk. Add items from the neighborhood around the church to the altar. If you've been spelling out the day's theme on the altar, maybe you could do: "SENT OUT TO LIVE...HERE!" and surround the letters with pictures and symbols from around your community.

Also, consider how you might emphasize the difference between a benediction and a sending forth this Sunday. Many places combine these liturgical elements together, and that's ok! But there is a distinct difference. A benediction is a blessing. A sending forth is a charge or a call to action. An influential pastor in my life used to end every benediction with the closing lines of the "Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 883):

In life, in death,

in life beyond death,

God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Taken alone, this is not so much a benediction as a sending forth, a charge to remember who and whose we are as we go from the space—a charge to live as people surrounded, held, and loved by God. Though this feels like a blessing, it is really a statement of fact, a reality that we cannot change by any effort or lack thereof on our part. Thus, the sending forth invites us to live our worship as the sent-out and scattered people of God who live in a world where God has taken up residence all around us.

PREACHING NOTES

We've come to an end. "End of what," you ask. Well, first, the end of this too long summer series where people are in and out, on vacation and traveling and only partly present. Or maybe, preacher, you managed to captivate the gathered body with this story of kings and choices—good and bad, mostly bad, it seemed at times. Maybe everyone has been perched on the edge of their pew waiting to see how it all comes out, how it ends. Well, here, at last, is the ending.

What other ending have we come to this week? The temple has been built; this is the dedication of that grand and glorious enterprise. If you can remember way back when we began this series, it started with David moving the Ark of the Covenant. And his dancing. Remember? David danced before the Lord, and everyone was moved by his passion and his joy. Well, almost everyone. That's the thing about dancing; not everyone gets it; not everyone joins in. There are some who sit on the sides and complain, who are embarrassed, who just don't get it. And you can respond by stopping the dance and going to sit on the side to save embarrassment. Or you can keep dancing. David kept dancing. And we watched him dance. He danced in his new house and his desire to house God. He danced with Bathsheba, even though she was not on his dance card, and he began to miss a step here and there; he began to show signs of strain in his dancing. He danced with his son, Absalom, though those steps began to falter. But it is hard, as the hymn says, to dance with the devil on your back. But we danced too. We saw the joy, and we wept with the brokenness; we experienced the blessing, and we acknowledged the sin. We danced, or sat, or leaned into this powerful story that is both not ours and ours at the same time. We too wanted to find a way to house God, maybe in our buildings, but mostly in our lives, in our hearts and souls so that God shines through in everything we do and all that we say.

And now we come to an end. As does Solomon. But Solomon doesn't dance at the completion of the task of building this temple. We skipped over the detail captured here in 1 Kings about how the temple was built. We skipped over the choosing and cutting of the wood, the carving of the stone, the pounding of the gold, all for the purpose of making the most glorious house that could be imagined for the most glorious God they knew. Solomon doesn't dance, as far as we can tell, as he stands before the people. Oh, maybe there was some nervous shuffling around when the smoke filled the newly built structure. Read the parenthetical verses in our assigned text this week. There isn't much, but a couple of glimpses of the culmination of the story, bringing it full circle as the ark is moved to this place of residence. And then a couple of verses about how God responded to finally being home. Verses 10 and 11 tell us that God moved in and pushed everyone out for a bit. The cloud came and was so thick that the ministers couldn't minister, it says. Maybe God needed a moment to relax, to kick off the divine footwear and massage the holy toes a bit before putting on the public face and joining the ceremony outside the holy of holies. And it seemed like Solomon smiled at this and nodded to God relaxing in that private space, saying, "I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell forever" (1 Kings 8:13 NRSV), and then he pulled the door closed as he bowed out or moved the thick curtain over the radiant space and moved back to continue to proceedings.

But Solomon didn't dance as David danced. No, Solomon prayed. Last week, we listened as God and Solomon engaged in a conversation during the darkness of the night. It was a private prayer, a private hope, a request for wisdom. And now, many years later, we stand at the end of this particular journey, and we listen in on a public prayer, an invitation to live as though God dwelt in the neighborhood. That's what this prayer is about, really. It is addressed to God, but it is a witness before the people. In the

prayer, Solomon expresses what is on each mind, we might assume, that the very idea that God would take up residence near us, next door, in this grand, purpose-built temple, yes, but also anywhere. How can any earthly thing contain the immensity of God? It staggers the mind, to be sure. But that is the promise. That is the hope. We are not alone. And therefore, we live every day in worship.

The implication of this staggering realization is that everything we do, our whole lives, is an act of worship. We are in the presence of God always. When the service ends, and we head out into the sunshine or the rain we left behind, worship continues. When we wake on Monday, ready to head into whatever occupies our time and our energy, worship continues. In the midst of the emails and the texts, in the meetings and lectures, and the meetings that could have been emails and the lectures that were paragraphs from the assigned readings, worship continues. In the encounters with neighbors and authorities, in answering the incessant questions from the children in our care, in navigating the jumble of emotions as we live in community and relationship, worship continues. That's what Solomon's prayer says. That's how each gathered worship experience concludes. That's the lived reality of the people of God, the blessing and the burden of worship, the joy and repentance, the praise and humbling hearing of the word, worship continues.

Our text, by picking up parts of the prayer (and why not just read the whole thing?) reminds us that this reality is true for those who claim to be a part of the people of God. But it is also true for those who don't yet know God, or who have rejected God or the God who was presented to them. It is true in a way that little is true these days. And our job is not to force worship on anybody, but to live and worship in such a way that there is a draw. There is an attraction, an invitation, a fresh expression of grace and glory in living such a worship-led life. When we follow the worship flow, we are then sent out to live a life of worship.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Disciples of Christ, why have you gathered today?

To worship God, who lives among us.

God lives among us all the time, so why have you gathered today?

To remind one another that God lives among us as we worship.

When you scatter from this place, what will you take with you?

Hearts open to recognize God living among us.

Then, come! Let us worship together!

We come to worship with rejoicing the Triune God who lives, loves, and moves among us as we gather and as we are sent from this place! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2024.

Prayer for the Day

Holy One of mystery and power,
there is no God like you
in heaven above or on earth below,
keeping covenant and steadfast love
with all who walk before you
with pure and upright hearts.
Fill our lives with your glory,
as you filled the temple with cloud
when Solomon first brought the ark
into your holy dwelling place.
Give us the strength and the power
to withstand the forces of evil
at work in our lives and in our world. Amen.

Adapted from The Abingdon Worship Annual 2009, © 2008 Abingdon Press. Posted on the Ministry Matters website, <http://www.ministrymatters.com/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Proper%2016%20B>.

Prayer of Confession

Spirit of God, we confess that we put on airs more often than we put on the armor of God. We are guilty of girding ourselves with lies instead of the truth. We try to protect ourselves with arrogance, superstition, and self-reliance instead of righteousness, faith, and your gift of salvation. Our footsteps do not follow your path of peace. And we are quick to use your Word to attack one another, instead of striking out against the sins we personally commit. Forgive us, Holy God. Gift us with the wisdom and strength to change our ways, so that we may live as your faithful ambassadors of the Good News. Amen.

Written by Amy Loving. Posted on The Worship Closet website, <http://worshipcloset.com/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/08/confession-ephesians-6-10-20.html>.

Benediction

Beloved, God dwells among us! This is good news! Go now in the blessing of the Triune God who created you, redeems you, and sustains you to live and love as neighbors to God and one another. Amen.

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