

Service of Prayer and Conversation in the Midst of Drought

This service has been arranged, in part, from a number of sources by Pastor Bill E. Harder, Pastor while at Armena Lutheran Parish, Armena Alberta. These sources include: conversations with producers in the area, with Rev. Dr. Cameron Harder of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon and with Mr. David Samm who is an agrologist in Camrose AB; as well, Rev. Martin Harrison of New Zealand has a "drought service" that is in circulation as does Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel of the ELCA (USA), both of which influenced the design of this service.

The service may be amended as necessary to fit into the context of Sunday worship; it was, however, designed as an ecumenical weekday evening worship service.

Each of the three "voices" were orally introduced from the rear of the church followed by the procession of the symbol particular to each voice. The symbol was carried in in silence and a few moments were given for meditation after the bearer had sat down. A three-tiered pedestal was set up in the chancel so that the symbols were added one by one to build upon each other. Symbols should reflect the unique needs/concerns of the community in which the service is held.

Prior to the introduction of the first voice the congregation may be invited to form into groups in the pews; during this time they may make introductions with each other (provide 5 minutes or so for this ? they will need to be reigned in!). These groups will be used throughout the service during the portion called "Sharing the Journey".

During "Sharing the Journey" invite the congregation to move into their groups (simply turning in the pew) and provide them with one or two starter questions: you may use those provided here or others more applicable to your context.

Hymn selections should be adapted according to context; however, these hymns seemed to be particularly appreciated.

The service bulletin for this service included the hymns, however, it did not include the text for the introduction to each voice, nor the prayers and the questions for conversation.

If you use this service, or some adaptation of it, I would be interested in hearing how it was received, and in having a copy of the service you use for my own files.

Introduction:

We gather as a community drawn together by our common journey through this drought; as we do so we pray to the living God, the God of love & infinite mercy, Creator of all that has life. We come to God as a people in need, in a time of crisis for the earth and yet touched by the hope and newness of life we have found in our Lord. In all of this we do not stand alone?

The Voice of Lament:

The first part of this service is about lament. We have gathered together to find hope, to be

renewed in blessing and our Lord will pour out both abundantly. The path, though, to hope and blessing runs through the pain of our loss and our anxiety. Fowl have died in the heat, herds have been sold because there is no feed; producers are turned away at the auctions because there are too many animals to process; crops wither. Grief, anger and frustration crowd our emotions and we need to know that our God hears the cries of our hearts.

Symbol and Silence:

Three small pots of dry soil are carried in and tipped over on the pedestal.

Hymn: "Healer of Our Every Ill" (*With One Voice* #738)

Reading: Jeremiah 14.1-9

Prayer in Psalm: Psalm 88

L: O LORD, God of my salvation, when, at night, I cry out in your presence,

C: let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry.

L: For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.

C: I am counted among those who go down to the Pit; I am like those who have no help,

L: like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave,

C: like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.

L: You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep.

C: You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a thing of horror to them.

L: I am shut in so that I cannot escape; my eye grows dim through sorrow.

C: Every day I call on you, O LORD; I, O LORD, cry out to you;

L: in the morning my prayer comes before you.

C: O LORD, why do you cast me off?

L: Why do you hide your face from me?

Prayers of Lament:

L: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

L: Let us pray, responding to each petition with the hymn "O Lord, Hear My Prayer" (*With One Voice* #772).

God of all creation, we cry out to you. The land is our hurting partner; she is thirsty, she is cracked and dry. Lord of the rains you weep for creation when she is hurt. Lord of life you weep with us in our loss, our despair, our hunger and thirst. Hear the cries of our heart, O God, and give us your Spirit to sustain us in the drought. We pray...

Lord, some livestock are dieing, others languish for lack of feed; stir up those who have resources to share in their abundance, that the creatures in our care may not suffer. We pray...

Lord, great economic stress hovers over us. Protect our families, our marriages, our community from the ravages of this dry season. Send your Holy Spirit to draw us to the wellspring of life and hope where despair and hopelessness are known no more. We pray...

Sharing The Journey:

What frustrates you about the lack of rainfall?

Describe your experience in the face of powerlessness during drought.

The Voice of Hope:

From where does our hope come?

Our hope is in God who is the LORD of all of creation; our hope is in the promises of Scripture wherein the Lord of life sustains and nourishes creation; our hope is in finding, in community, the strength and support to live. Our hope is that the rains will come ? spiritual rains that wash despair from our thirsting spirits and physical rain to nourish the land. We have cried out our lament, now we reach for hope. Hear the words of Habakkuk and of the Psalmist as they draw us into the heart of God.

Symbol and Silence:

Three pitchers of water are carried in and slowly poured into a large bowl on the pedestal.

Hymn: "God of the Farmlands" (*Voices United* #306)

Reading: Habakkuk 3.17-19

Prayer in Psalm: Psalm 65

L: Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion;

C: and to you shall vows be performed,

L: O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.

C: By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,

L: O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth

C: and of the farthest seas.

L: You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;

C: the river of God is full of water;

L: you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.

C: You water its furrows abundantly,

L: settling its ridges, softening it with showers,

C: and blessing its growth.

L: You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

C: The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy,

L: the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain,

C: they shout and sing together for joy.

Prayers of Hope:

L: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

L: Let us pray, responding to each petition with the hymn "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" (*With One Voice* #775)

God of springtime and planting, stir in our hearts hope for the harvest; not merely the harvest of our labours, but more so the harvest that is yours in the Spirit. May we, by your Spirit, know the

abundant produce that is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control, these, the fruit of the Spirit. We pray...

God of love may we know your love in each other. Bind us together as family as we walk these dusty roads of drought. Grant that we may carry each other's burdens and ease each other's shame. Give us a spirit of love to share with each other, even in our lack. We pray...

God of earth and sky, land and seas; break open the vault of heaven and pour rain upon the dry lands. May every country and all peoples on earth who suffer from drought be drenched in rain until the land is quenched and the ditches overflow. May we dance in the rain as we sing praise to you for your provision. We pray...

Sharing The Journey:

What do you need from God right now; what is your heart's desire?

What is the difference between hope and wishful thinking?

The Voice of Blessing:

As our hope is stirred we become open to the blessing of our God. In this way we seek God's blessing in all aspects of our life our work, our families and our communities. We recognize blessing as God's ongoing presence with us, God's grace surrounding us, God's love giving us strength. As God blesses us, so do we bless the Lord by offering our lives as a sacrifice of praise and service.

Symbol and Silence:

A live (and healthy) plant in a pot, along with seed to be spilled around the pot, are carried to the pedestal.(a plant representing crops planted in the area is appropriate).

Hymn: "Great is Thy Faithfulness" (*With One Voice* #771)

Reading: Revelation 22.1-5

Prayer in Psalm: Selections from Psalms 104 and 147

L: Sing praises to the LORD; praise our God with harps.

C: You fill the sky with clouds and send rain to the earth and make grass grow on the hills.

L: You give food to cattle and to the little birds that call.

C: You make springs pour into the ravines; they flow between the mountains.

L: They water all the wild animals; the wild donkeys come there to drink.

C: Wild birds make nests by the water; they sing among the tree branches.

L: You water the mountains from above. The earth is full of the things you made.

C: You make the grass for cattle and vegetables for the people. You make food grow from the earth.

L: You give us wine that makes happy hearts and olive oil that makes our faces shine.

C: You give us bread that gives us strength. The LORD's trees have plenty of water;

L: they are the cedars of Lebanon, which he planted.

Prayers of Blessing:

L: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

L: Let us pray, responding to each petition with the hymn "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" (*With One Voice* #775)

Lord of all hopefulness walk with us as we return to our homes. Be our guide through these days of crises, our light when we enter the dark night of the soul. We pray...

Lord bless us in community that none shall fall prey to despair. We cling to you and in so doing we reach out our hands to our neighbour. May we know your love and strength in the embrace of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We pray...

O God, we bless you for your faithfulness, for your provision of all that we need. We thank you for fulfilling your promise to be with us, to laugh with us, to cry with us. We bless you for drawing us into your heart by water and by the Word that we might know life abundant, even as we are challenged by struggles in our lives. Lord, we bless you and offer up our lives as living sacrifices, made holy by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Opportunity for spontaneous prayer offered by the congregation may be made here)

All for which we have prayed we place in your hands, trusting in your grace and mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Sharing The Journey:

The final conversations will take place during coffee following the service.

Your questions to ponder are:

How do God's promises help you during this time of trial?

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Blessing:

Psalm 144

C: Let our sons in their youth grow like plants. Let our daughters be like the decorated stones in the Temple.

Let our barns be filled with crops of all kinds.

Let our sheep in the fields have thousands and tens of thousands of lambs.

Let our cattle be strong. Let no one break in.

Let there be no war, no screams in our streets.

Happy are those who are like this; happy are the people whose God is the LORD.