

That They May All Be One

Prayers for Mission: 1 Sunday

November 6, 2011

Isaiah 58:1-12 and John 17:20-26.

*This Sunday finds us in the midst of the United Church of Christ event **Mission: 1**. During these 11-days we join as one body of Christ to confront the yoke of hunger in our communities and in our world. We seek after God and discover all too often that God-with-us is a Hungry God, found in the hunger of children, of homeless people, of middle class families suddenly needing food stamps, of the poor who have long been addressing this need, of whole populations confronted with drought and famine. What does our Hungry God require? What does our Hungry God call us to? We may explore these questions, confident that our Hungry God is also our Sustaining and Strengthening God.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Hunger is known in all communities, rural, small town, big city. Sights and sounds alerting us to hunger's presence differ from community to community. The metaphor we have chosen for this service is an urban one, however you may substitute a symbol which comes more from your circumstances, if that is appropriate.

Anyone who has spent any time in a city knows the challenging sound of change rattling in a paper coffee cup. It's a sound that you can hear on mass transit even before you can see the person asking for change. It's an insistent noise that requires some action: taking the risk of opening your purse, or actively ignoring the sound and letting the person in need pass by. Use this familiar experience to call all to attention in your worship space. After the prelude, invite one person to begin rattling a paper cup with a few coins. Allow the noise to elicit all of those emotions as this one person moves toward the front of the sanctuary while asking for change. (It's OK if this person actually leans into the pews with his/her cup.) Ask that this same person lead the invocation.

INVOCATION

Come, Hungry God:

Rattle our hearts.

Come, Hungry God:

Demand our attention.

Come, Hungry God:

Reveal a hungry world.

Come, Hungry God:

Make your voice heard.

Come, Hungry God:

Loosen our hearts.

Come, Hungry God:

Feed our imaginations.

Come, Hungry God:

Nourish our courage.
Come, Hungry God:
As you are in Christ, and Christ is in us, make us one.
In your hunger for beauty, justice and fullness of life:
Make us one!
Come, Hungry God, come!

COLLECTING OF FOOD AND LETTERS

Following this invocation, invite the congregation to bring their food drive items and letters collected to date to surround the communion table in witness to God's abundance. (You'll probably want to have a volunteer or two available to arrange bags so that they are not in the way. These volunteers can also offer words of thanks as gifts are shared.)

Accompany the collection of food with a song celebrating God's Justice and Hope, such as
Help us to be Present (Sing! 80)
Through All the World, a Hungry Christ (TNCH 587)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION *(adapted from **Bread for the World's Prayer for a Time of Hunger**, <http://www.bread.org/help/church/worship>)*

Hungry God, we ask you to pour your spirit into all of those who are empty today:
Fill the hearts of the troubled. Fill the minds of the confused.
Fill the stomachs of the hungry.
Fill the souls of the lost.
Fill the lives of all who need you.
Fill us with compassion and hope.
Forgive us when we fail to see those bearing the yoke of hunger in our world.
Forgive us when we refuse to believe that hunger can end in our time.
May your spirit fill us to overflowing, Sustaining God.
Let us write the letters and stock the food pantries shelves of our community,
but let us do more!
May we dare to act on in your promise
that there will be no more empty hearts, minds, stomachs or souls.
May we dare to break the yoke of hunger in our world.
We pray this with the Risen Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR

WORDS OF ASSURANCE *(inspired by Isaiah 58:1-12)*

Hear the promise of our Hungry, Longing, Passionate, Steadfast God
who invites us to a fast of doing justice:
“Your healing shall spring up,
and glory shall be your rear guard.

When you call, God will answer: 'Here I am.'"
Be filled in God's Still Speaking presence now and always. **Amen.**

CALL FOR THE OFFERING

(Instead of passing the offering plates, pass large paper cups through the congregation, hearkening back to the opening of the service)

In the giving of our tithes and offerings, let us live into Jesus' vision
That we may all be one.

May we see the world as Jesus did,
and work for justice on behalf of the hungry and the poor.

May we be united in heart, mind, stomach and soul
as we give to our neighbors in need around the world.

Our God makes us one
with all of her children rattling their coins:

 changing lives and transforming communities

Let us shake our cups to overflowing
so that we may be united in heart, mind, stomach and soul
as we give to our neighbors in need at home and across the world.

*(The worship leader may be encouraged to shake her paper cup during the
Offertory so that it may be wise to plan accordingly with your music director.)*

DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING

Gather these paper cups together into baskets and place them upon the altar near the food which has been collected.

Hungry God, whose glory we glimpse, make us one.

May we become completely one through the giving of these gifts and offerings with all our neighbors in need. **Amen.**

THAT THEY MAY BE ONE: HOLY COMMUNION

Our national dialogue has been charged with the pointing of fingers and the speaking of evil. In the celebration of Christ's table on this Sunday, it may be most powerful to gather at this feast in silence. Invite the congregation into the drama of the ritual where only this invitation to the table is spoken.

Hungry God, you are in Christ, and Christ is in us.

Hungry God, you come to meet us in this feast.

You come to offer the hope we need to find.

You come to nourish us with these gifts.

You come to share your presence revealed already

in children in the camps of Africa,

in the homeless traversing the unlit pathways of the New York City subway,

in the middle class unemployed who have been forced to apply for foodstamps,

in the poor that know the system well,

in the soup kitchen patron who doesn't want vegetables,
in the volunteers with bad backs who stock your pantry shelves
and in the One who invites us to this feast.
Hungry God, we are in Christ, and Christ is in you.
May we come to this table and find ourselves one in your hunger and your hope.
May we come in holy silence to experience what words cannot
fully describe in the abundance of this feast.
May we taste and see your promise that all may be one.
Hungry God, come! All things are ready.

After this spoken invitation, in silence, lift up the elements in grand gestures. Invite all to lift their hands in a gesture of blessing over the gifts (you may want to have a few leaders in place to show the way by example). Returning the elements to the table, reach to the heavens in silent prayer as you bless the elements; again, invite all to join in the gesture. Undergirding these gestures, you may want to return to the sound of coins rattling in the paper cups, this time in a more intentional, rhythmic way. Serve communion as you might otherwise. Break the loaf in half. Pour the wine. Do all of these usual actions without words. Because of the silence, it is best to choose the most familiar form of receiving communion to your church family -- and be sure to include simple instructions in the bulletin for visitors. After the feast, sing the Prayer of Thanksgiving using one of the justice hymns suggested at the collection of food and letters earlier.

BLESSING FOR MISSION: 1

During this 11-day event, UCC congregations have individually imagined their own efforts of justice to end hunger. Each church family has taken on a unique vision toward the pursuit of that justice. At this halfway point on this 11-day journey, you may want to include a blessing for the good work being realized.

One: Hungry God, you have revealed glory within us.
We are united in the work that we share in these eleven days
as we share the common hope
that this work we now share will help to end hunger in our time.

All: Hungry God, help us not to lose heart.

One: Hungry God, you have given us this work.
You have shown us what must change.
You have made the broken yoke clear
and dared us to imagine the hungry and poor could be full.

All: Hungry God, give us strength.

One: Hungry God, you make your name known.
You bless our work as we become one with you.
Be in our hearts and in our hands in gathering healthy food, stocking shelves,
feeding hungry souls, writing letters to political powers.

All: Hungry God, show us your glory.

One: Hungry God, you make us one.
You remind us that we are not alone.
You give us companions on the journey.
You build us up through their love when we are ready to give up.

All: Hungry God, you are our Sustaining God: make us one.
One: Sustaining God, shine your love within us.
All: Seed Planting God, let the world know your love.
One: Nurturing God, strengthen us in this mission.
All: Harvest God, let the world reap your love. Amen.

BENEDICTION (*inspired by Isaiah 58:1-12*)

One: Our God will guide continually.
All: Our God will satisfy needs in parched places.
One: Our God will make our bones strong.
All: Let us rebuild what has been ruined.
One: Let us repair the breach.
All: Let us restore the streets we live in. Amen.

That They May All be One: Prayers for the Mission: 1 Sunday was written by the Rev. Elsa A. Peters, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, presently serving as Pastor and Teacher of the First Congregational UCC in South Portland, ME, an Open and Affirming congregation where God is still speaking. She wonders about ministry and liturgy at: <http://impossiblethingswithgod.blogspot.com/>.



Copyright 2011 Local Church Ministries, Congregational Vitality and Discipleship Ministry Team, United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Permission granted to reproduce or adapt this material for use in services of worship or church education. All publishing rights reserved.

