

**A Liturgy for Outdoor Ministries Sunday**  
**July 13, 2014**  
**Frank Ward**

**Call to Worship**

Leader: The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,  
**People: the world, and those who live in it;**  
Leader: for he has founded it on the seas  
**People: and established it on the rivers.**  
Leader: Lift up your heads, O gates!  
**People: and be lifted up, O ancient doors!**  
Leader: that the King of glory may come in.  
**People: Who is this King of glory?**  
**All: The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.**

*Psalm 24:1-2, 9-10*

**Call to Confession**

Who does not need to bear their soul before God? Who does not need to step aside from the demands and challenges of the regular routine of life to explore what makes us tick, inside and out? Who does not need to retreat to the beauty and quietness of creation to listen, explore and connect with the Creator and other creatures of God? Could it be you? Me? If so, let's confess together something that we may have in common.

**Prayer of Confession**

Ever-present God, we sometimes think we can escape your presence and your judgment. But we discover even as we flee to the out of doors, campsites, retreat centers and communities of faith, you are there.  
Whenever we sink to the depths of darkness, you are there.  
Whenever we hide our flaws and feelings and failures, you are there.  
Whenever we turn only to ourselves for a way out, you are there.  
Whenever we ascend to the stage of status and popularity and self-glory, you are there.  
Whenever we turn aside leaving someone in the ditches of homeliness, hunger, horror, despair, and desperation, you are there.  
Whenever we take up arms against our neighbor and seek to settle disputes through violence, you are there.  
Whenever we abuse your creation and the resources through which you grace our lives thinking only of ourselves and not of future generations, you are there.  
In other words, God, there is no where we can go to escape your love and mercy and, yes, judgment.  
Please help us search for meaning through love and self-giving service rather than in consuming things and worshipping ourselves and our friends.

Make us more whole than broken, more forgiven than guilty,  
more consumed by joy than by our hunger for money, more fixed on hope than despair.  
We stand in need of prayer; and so we pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

The Promiser keeps the promise. If we sincerely and truly bear our souls and earnestly seek forgiveness and mercy, God is there to reassure us that not even our sin can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord. As far as the East is from the West, the North from the South, so are the reaches of God's love. Wear the badge of forgiveness, even if for a while. Until you come again to the throne of mercy, God bless you!

### **The Litany of Love**

*Psalm 136:1-9, 26 (The Message)*

*(Note: Select 4 different persons standing at various places in the worship center to read the respective parts of the leaders.)*

**Leader 1:** Thank God! He deserves your thanks.  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 2:** Thank the God of all gods,  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 3:** Thank the Lord of all lords.  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 4:** Thank the miracle-working God  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 1:** The God whose skill formed the cosmos,  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 2:** The God who laid out earth on ocean foundations,  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 3:** The God who filled the skies with light,  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 4:** The sun to watch over the day,  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 1:** Moon and stars as guardians of the night,  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 2:** God remembered us when we were down,  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 3:** Rescued us from the trampling boot,  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**Leader 4:** Takes care of everyone in time of need.  
**People:** **His love never quits.**

**All Leaders:** Thank God, who did it all!  
**People:** **His love never quits!**

## **Prayer for Illumination**

We are embarrassed to admit it, O God, but we are too often hard of hearing and even slower to understand. We often listen with our ears and not our hearts. So, please, open our lives to experience your love and celebrate your gift of creation! Speak to us through the parables of everyday life and the psalms of the natural world. Amen.

## **Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon**

*(Note: Pastors may wish to invite persons who have attended camps or conferences or retreats to share something of how God spoke to their lives in these special settings.)*

**Old Testament: Isaiah 55:1-13**—Sometimes we need to get away from our convictions that money and food are what save us and admit our thirst for that which is priceless—God’s Word, God’s love. God speaks and even the mountains explode in song and the fields clap with joy! Outdoor experiences invite us to listen to creation and our own heartbeats in new ways. Even though God’s ways are not our ways we are sometimes more open to be still and lend ourselves to the guidance of God’s Spirit at camp or in a retreat or with tent set up beside a river or lake.

**Epistle: Romans 8:1-11**—Many of the outdoor ministries provided by congregations and presbyteries focus on helping persons, young and old, to live together in a Christ-like community for a limited period of time—sometimes a weekend, sometimes a week, etc. Building a Christian community invites persons to think not just of themselves but of others, to care not only for themselves but of others. It’s a call to be open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in a special way and to accept and respect others, especially those who seem so unlovable or unlikeable, as valued children of God. Sowing seeds of love means letting go of our own securities and biases and pride.

**Gospel: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**—It’s in the out of doors that we discover most readily the meaning of growth, nurture, pruning, planting, sowing. This parable explores the invitation of Christ for us to sow seeds of love no matter what. It reminds us that it is in giving up ourselves that we discover more fully who we are. We can only sow (share) the faith that we have, even though it is a growing faith. Our task is not to make the plant take root and grow or wilt and die, but just to sow. The fate of the seed is in God’s care, not our own. So when we come together to experience and build community whether in church camp or some other place, we have opportunity for Christ’s Spirit to permeate our lives and give us occasion to share with others without pretense.

## **Prayers of the People**

This is a special Sunday for us, O God. We celebrate the gift of ministries in outdoor settings. We thank you for providing opportunities where boys and girls, teenagers and

adults can gather away from the everyday doings to experience your creation. For the places that are dear to our hearts (*name particular campsites, conference/retreat centers, etc. that your people utilize*) where we experience community and discover anew your marvelous creation, we humbly say “Thank you.”

“For the beauty of the earth; For the glory of the skies, For the love which from our birth over and around us lies: Lord of all... we raise... our joyful... praise.” In our thanksgiving and praise, O God, we ask you to extend special blessings on these ministries. For those who plan and lead camps, retreats, conferences and other outdoor ministries, we ask for your guiding wisdom and inspiring spirit. For those who serve as leaders and share their lives and faith with others, we ask for your sustaining grace. For persons of all ages who participate in these experiences, we ask that your presence abide in abundance as they discover love and grace in the midst of community and in the beauty of nature. As persons are separated from the familiar, provide a sense of belonging and security so that the baggage they bring can be unpacked without threat and with understanding love. As we seek your blessings, we also ask that you help these persons when they return to the familiar and rejoin our community of faith, to feel free to share their experiences and reconnect with those who love and care for them.

May your blessings abound! Amen.

### **Invitation to the Offering**

Just then he looked up and saw the rich people dropping offerings in the collection plate. Then he saw a poor widow put in two pennies. He said, “The plain truth is that this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford—she gave her all!”

*Luke 21:1-4 (The Message)*

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

When you look up, Christ Jesus, what do you see from us? Hopefully you see thankful people who claim life as a gift, not measured in money but self-giving love. We come now to give of ourselves to you, thanking you for your creation and for all that is. We give it to you and ask you to bless it. And in your grace, miracle of miracles, you turn right around and give it back to us, except now it is blessed and must be used accordingly for your glory. Thank you. Amen.

### **Charge and Benediction**

As you walk out the doors of this place today, may your ears perk up, your eyes sparkle with expectancy, and your heart dance with delight as you experience: the songs of the birds, the touch of the breeze, the rustle of the leaves, the warmth of the sunlight, the smile of a child, and the leaping faith of a friend. And may God the Creator be always

nearer than breathe and a challenging presence in your life; may God the Holy Spirit bless you in surprising and unexpected ways, and may God the Christ embrace you with love and decorate your life with a tinge of joy! Amen.