

## A Liturgy for National Farm Worker Awareness Week

March 27, 2016

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*[March 27 is Easter Sunday this year. This liturgy does not commingle the farm worker emphasis with Easter themes and may be used as the church calendar permits.]*

*National Farm Worker Awareness Week begins March 27, 2016 in the United States. The annual focus on farm worker issues occurs near March 31<sup>st</sup>, the birth date of civil rights leader Cesar Chavez. In the US, an estimated two to three million farm workers toil under oppressive conditions, both natural and institutional, however, farm workers labor all over the world to bring food from the earth to sustain the world's population. It is right and fitting that we lift them up in a worship setting, celebrating their gifts, honoring their struggles, and pleading for their justice.*

### **Call to Worship**

Leader: We gather in worship today to lift up brothers and sisters who are too often invisible.

**People: See our brothers and sisters, God, and help us to see them.**

Leader: Under pain of injustice—abuse, neglect, poverty, and separation from loved ones—they cry out.

**People: Hear our brothers and sisters, God, and help us to hear them.**

Leader: Beaten, bruised, torn, and poisoned by chemicals, they are sick.

**People: Heal our brothers and sisters, God, and help us to heal them.**

Leader: Using their bodies, minds, and spirits, they coax from the earth your provision for us all.

**People: Bless our brothers and sisters, God, and help us to bless them.**

### **Call to Confession**

Scripture tells us those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for Christ's sake, will find it. As we recognize how tightly we hold to our lives, let us humbly approach God in unison confession.

### **Prayer of Confession (unison)**

Creator God, we confess we hold our pursuit of happiness and wholeness so important that we often neglect those who supply our basic needs. We do not want to see our own guilt in systems of injustice, but in this moment help us see and repent. Help us want safety and well-being for those far and near who contribute so much to our own household's safety and well-being. Help us turn from the construction of our own kingdoms to the participation in your kingdom. We offer now our silent prayers of confession and repentance. *(Pause for silent confessions.)*

### **Assurance of Pardon**

Christ chose the elements of the earth—wheat from the field and fruit of the vine—as symbols of remembrance. Every time we come to the table for a meal, we can remember our sin, turn from it, and receive the meal as grace. When we rise, we may work for peace as the forgiven! Thanks be to God!

### **Prayer for Illumination**

Loving God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us that we may hear your word afresh in its reading today. Reveal more of yourself and your way for us. As we listen, we pray we may be moved to live as people who treasure your words in our hearts and enact them as we live out our days, participants in the building of your kingdom. Amen.

### **Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon**

- 1 Peter 4:1-11
- Deuteronomy 24:14-15
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

### **Prayers of Intercession**

God, we often pray for those who do not have what they need: food, shelter, love. Today we pray for those of us who do have what we need and have it in abundance. We pray that we would notice that what we have has a price that is beyond the price we pay. What we enjoy has a price paid by workers who are often working in slave labor conditions, without a voice, without agency over their own lives, without civil rights. They pay this price so that we can keep our own costs low. This is not your economy God. As people of faith, we need a vision of your economy.

We pray for children who must labor in the fields instead of going to school, we pray for women who must pay with their bodies before being granted the opportunity to labor in the fields, we pray for men who travel long distances away from their families to labor in the fields. We pray for the farm workers who live in constant fear—fear of deportation, fear of harm to a loved one, fear of malnutrition and starvation, fear of heat stroke, fear of pesticide poisoning, fear of bad weather, fear of poor harvest, fear of being unwanted, unnoticed, despised. While they are busy at work, God, grant us hearts and courage for justice on their part. Direct our steps that we may alleviate the suffering of those who give so much for our daily bread. We ask these things in the name of the one who gave all, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### **Invitation to the Offering**

Cesar Chavez said, “When we are really honest with ourselves, we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So, it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of people we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving do we find life.” Let us follow Cesar’s example. As we seek to live whole-heartedly, let us give whole-heartedly.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God, please accept our offerings of time, talents, and resources for the building of your kingdom. Guide us in the use of the offerings of this community that all may know you are God and we are all brothers and sisters. Make us aware of the offerings all around us, given for us that we may also know more of you and our belovedness. Amen.

### **Charge and Benediction**

May you never take for granted the food yielded by the earth, coaxed from tilling to harvest by many hands, that becomes your daily bread; may you demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit as you seek love and justice for farm workers around the world; and may you live this day sharing the good news that Christ came for all!

Now, go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen!

### **Other Resources:**

- National Farm Worker Ministry <http://nfwm.org/education-center/faithbasedresources/>
- Beth-el Farmworker Ministry <http://beth-el.org/>
- Student Action with Farmworkers <https://www.saf-unite.org/content/what-farmworker-awareness-week>

### **Recommended films:**

- Documentaries: *Harvest of Dignity*, *Food Chains*, *Food Inc.*
- Dramatic: *Cesar Chavez*, *The Grapes of Wrath*