

A Liturgy for Seminary Sunday
September 25, 2016
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The mission of Memphis Theological Seminary is to educate and sustain men and women for ordained and lay Christian ministry in the church and the world through shaping and inspiring lives devoted to scholarship, piety and justice. Today, we are invited to reflect on the role of theological education and to pray for the ministry of Memphis Theological Seminary where many of our religious leaders have been or are being educated.

Call to Worship

Leader: We praise you, O God.

People: We praise God, for in our souls, we know how marvelously God has made us.

Leader: God's ways are strange and full of wonder.

People: We praise you, O God, from our souls.

Leader: O come, let us worship and sing forth our praises to God who is good.

People: We shall humbly worship God, our God who is good all the time.

Call to Confession

Let us bring before God the sin which weighs heavily upon us—sins of omission and commission, sin which has separated us from God and one another. Let us ask for God's grace.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

Lord, be merciful to us and forgive us—for our futile despairs and constant forgetfulness of your compassion; for sins we knowingly have committed and sins that are unknown to us; for our individual failures and our communal failings; for concentrating our gaze on the evil and neglecting to see the good; for our failures to praise you, to thank you and for our refusal to live by the power of love; for our unjust acts and attitudes—through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ! And Christ died for us, rose for us, reigns in power for us, and prays for us. Because of Christ, to whomsoever repents and believes, God promises reconciliation and full pardon. Accept your pardon. You are forgiven. The peace of God be with you.

Prayer for Illumination

Loving God, illumine our minds and hearts that we may see you more clearly and love you more completely. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon the word that shall be proclaimed, that we may hear the word of God breathing freshly into our hearts and minds. Amen.

Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon

- Genesis 3:1-5 Exploration of the Call to Ministry
- Jeremiah 8:20-22 Is There a Balm in Gilead?
- Mark 8:31-38 The Cost of Discipleship
- II Timothy 2:15 The Need for Theological Education

Prayers of the People

We give you thanks, Holy and Everlasting God, Sovereign Lord, for you have acted graciously and justly, and we are witnesses to your mighty acts. You call, and we respond. You lead, and we follow. You take care of each one. We thank you for the constancy of your loving kindness and tender mercies toward us.

On this special Sunday, we thank you for theological education. We pray for Memphis Theological Seminary, a community where many religious leaders have studied. By your grace, you have formed it into a community of learners and seekers of truth. Empower all who are currently a part of that seminary community and give them the assurance of your abiding presence.

You have gathered them in one body—from the north and south, east and west, across racial lines, across denominational affiliations, male and female, conservatives, moderates and liberals, rich and poor. Unite them in a spirit of love and in pursuit of excellence of character.

Surprise the community with the discovery of how much of your kingdom they can experience. Let your kingdom be alive among them, and let them see evidence of it in the way they meet, greet, respect, and protect the rights of each other.

Thank you for the many wonderful people who contribute their gifts to help to shape this community:

—Thank you for the commitment of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church that this seminary be ecumenical and remain open to various traditions, faiths and cultures.

—We thank you for the tireless and painstaking work of the Board of Trustees. You have assigned to them the oversight of this institution, and we ask you to guide them in all their decision-making. Order their doings that your kingdom may be advanced.

—Thank you for those who serve as administrators and staff, many who serve behind the scenes to keep the institution afloat. Thank you for their dedication, their love for you, and their commitment to the institution.

—Thank you for those who teach. Create in the Memphis Theological Seminary professors inquiring minds and good understanding, so that all they teach may learn your truth and do it gladly.

—Thank you for the students, unique and dedicated individuals with inquiring minds, maturing faith, and love for you. Thank you for bringing to this seminary, men and women who sacrifice

greatly and who endure difficult schedules, because they are eager to learn more and thus serve your people better. Give them tender hearts, loving hearts, caring and compassionate hearts, but also give them tough minds to wrestle with your word, so that, as they speak and act for you, listeners may repent and return to love, believing in Jesus Christ who is our Lord and master.

You have drawn that community in faith to follow your son. It is he who is the way that leads to you. He is the truth which fills with joy. He is the life that sustains and gives hope. Receive our thanks for Memphis Theological Seminary, in the name of Jesus, our friend. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

God calls us to be good stewards of all that has been entrusted to our care—the earth, the world, and all that dwells therein. As good stewards, may we honor the Lord by presenting our tithes and offerings in a spirit of worship.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God, accept our gifts this day. Thank you for this opportunity to return to you a portion of what you have entrusted to us. We offer you our very best. Consecrate and bless these gifts. May they bless the work of ministry both here and Memphis Theological Seminary. Amen.

Charge

Let us carry out our lives with commitment to our God. With every gift and with our hearts, let us serve God and all of God's children, with every moment of our lives.

Benediction

Go in peace. You are forgiven.

Go in service. Remember those in prison, the poor, the anxious, the despairing, and those who fear death. Tell them by your life that they are loved.

Go in the power of God. May God be with you and abide with you now and forever. Amen.