



**A Liturgy to Celebrate! Being a Christian Disciple
Week Eight of 2016 Christian Education Season
September 25, 2016
Elinor Brown**

Preparation for the Sunday:

- *Locate a copy of the song "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang to play as a gathering song for worship each Sunday of the CE Season. You may not want to play the entire song since it is about four minutes long and repeats.*
- *Ask your worship committee or a creative bunch of folks to decorate the worship area with items from each week of the CE Season. Have a large stand-up sign in the middle of the altar that says "I am a Christian Disciple." Then decorate the altar with brightly colored cloth to cover the whole table and flow down to the floor. Then decoratively place some of the bigger and/or more unique items from each of the seven other weeks on the table to represent the culmination of the entire season. If you wish, you may add things like leaves, snow, flowers and sun to represent all of the four seasons. Have fun with it. Also make some sort of nametag for each of the persons attending church that day that says "I am a Christian Disciple!" You may want to get the children or youth involved in making these tags and handing them out to everyone as they come into the worship space. Again, this is a time of celebration so streamers and party supplies are always appropriate.*
- *Look through the Additional Activities at the end of this liturgy and decide which of these you will do. Make plans to do them and gather materials as needed. You will also need to publicize and recruit people to help you with them so leave plenty of time to do so.*

Call to Worship

Leader: Come from the losses, frustrations, disappointments and failures of your life.

**People: To this place where a word of hope is spoken for us,
Where we are claimed by God as Christian disciples.**

Leader: Come from the successes and excitement of your life.

People: To this place, sharing our joy with one another.

**All: Here in this place we are a people, God's people,
Who laugh and cry together,
who expand our thinking, strengthen our souls, and engage God's mission.**

—adapted, Richard Cunningham, from The Gifts We Bring, v.2, Ecumenical Stewardship Center

Call to Confession

Leader: "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciples."

**People: Lord, there must be an easier way. I promise to be reasonably good,
to come to church even when it rains, to make a pie for the bake sale.**

Leader: "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciples."

**People: Lord, following you is costly.
I pledge to write a letter to my congressional representative,
to read a chapter of the Bible every day.**

Leader: "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciples."

**People: Lord, your way is hard. What do you want from me?
Everything I've got? My whole life?**

Leader: "Those who would save their lives will lose them;
Those who lose their lives for my sake will find them.

People: To this place, sharing our joy with one another.

—Ken Gible, from The Gifts We Bring, v.2, Ecumenical Stewardship Center

Let us confess our sins to God.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

O God, we call ourselves Christian disciples, but sometimes we are not a very good example for others. We cut people off in traffic. We listen a little too gleefully to the gossip in the break room at work. We turn the other way when there is a street person at the corner where we are turning. We don't take time to talk to you in prayer unless we are sitting in church and then sometimes we are just going through the motions. Give us a passion to have a closer walk with you. Revive our hearts to want to serve others as Jesus taught us. Guide us in our meditation on the scriptures so they speak to us more fervently than ever before. Forgive us of our sins and give us the courage to forgive others who sin against us. Make us want to be better followers of Christ Jesus every day. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

God is amazing! We were once sinners, but God doesn't hold that against. We have confessed our sin and God in mercy, love, and kindness has said that they are no more. Friends, hear and believe the good news. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

Children's Message

Read the book The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown. If you do not own this book, this is a great opportunity to buy it for yourself or for your church's nursery or library. After reading it, you may want to make the following points:

- Today we are talking about being Christian disciples or followers of Christ. Christian disciples are people who know that God is always with them and will be with them no matter what. Because we know this, we live a life that is faithful, doing God's work in the world.
- You probably have already read this book, but it is a perfect picture of God. The little bunny says that he is going to run away from the mother bunny. He imagines that he is going to turn into all sorts of things in order to get away from his mother: a fish, a rock, a crocus (which is a flower), a bird, a sailboat, a flying trapeze performer, and a little boy.
- But his mother says each time, that she will change into things that will bring him back to her; she would change into a fisherman and fish for him, a mountain climber and climb to him, a gardener and find him, a tree to come home to, the wind to blow him home, a tightrope walker and walk across the air to him, a mother to catch him in her arms. And she says this right at first: "I will run after you. For you are my little bunny."
- God is like this. God is always with us no matter what. It may sometimes feel like God is not close by, but God is. God is a safe place where we can come. Christ said that he was sending the Holy Spirit to us, a part of God, to help us, to make us feel better, to guide us, and sometimes to make us feel like we want to be the best person we can be. We can thank God that God is always with us.
- Then pray something like this: God, we thank you for always being with us. We know as your disciples that no matter what we are never alone. You are with us, helping us. Thank you for the people you have given us in our lives that show us your love. Help us to show that love back to others. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Lord, open our eyes to see your word. Open our ears to hear your Good News. Open our mouths to sing your praise and tell your stories. Open our hearts to reach out to others and share your love, joy and peace with them. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon

- 2 Timothy 4:1-8—Paul says to teach the message/truth before people decide not to listen anymore; run the race.

This scripture provides an opportunity for the pastor to talk about the fact that Christian discipleship is teaching and sharing the message with all people, helping them discover the truths of God; be the good teacher to everyone.

This day is a time for all of the church to celebrate themselves as Christian disciples whether they are young or old, very involved or not so much, whether they are good at being a disciple or struggle to follow God's path. This is the last Sunday of the CE Season so it is a good time to tie all of the last two month's celebration together. Be sure to take advantage of this time.

Prayer of Intercession

God, awaken in us the desire to be your faithful followers.

Forgive our glib confessions of faith, our easy mouthing of pious words, without understanding or caring enough what faith requires of us.

Increase our confidence in your trustworthiness and in the goodness of your plan for us and for all people.

Strengthen our desire above all else to be in harmony with your plan, and to embody your Spirit in our own time and place, as Jesus did in his.

We remember the witness of brothers and sisters in Christ over the centuries who knew the cost of obedience to you and who willingly suffered ridicule and rejection, torture and imprisonment, and even death for your sake and the gospel's.

We celebrate the faithfulness of sisters and brothers in our own time who are freely spending their lives in the struggle against inhumanity and injustice as your living presence among the poor and oppressed.

We pray for courage to ask where the path of true discipleship may lead us, and to live out the answer with joy, accepting whatever risk that may bring to us.

Help us make strong the bonds of caring support within our church family. Transform our weakness and fear into strength as we minister to one another in the name of Christ. Amen.

—Fran Clemens Nyce, from *The Gifts We Bring*, v.2, *Ecumenical Stewardship Center*

Introduce the Christian Education Season offering and tell the congregation that you are giving this offering to the Discipleship Ministry Team of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in order to participate as a partner with other Cumberland Presbyterian churches in the work of Christian discipleship all over the world. Invite them to go to cpcmc.org to become familiar with all the work they are doing through this partnership.

Invitation to the Offering

If one takes a gallon jar to the well, one can return with a gallon of water. If one takes a pint bottle to the well, one can leave with only a pint of water. You see, the measure we use in giving ourselves and our resources to God's work on earth is the same measure of satisfaction we receive. The greater the measure we give, the greater the satisfaction; the smaller the measure, the less satisfaction we feel. Surely this is what the Apostle Paul has in mind when he says, "The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

—Tom Shifflet, from *The Gifts We Bring*, v.3, Ecumenical Stewardship Center

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Take these gifts that we have brought O God. Consecrate them, we pray, to the mission entrusted to us: the strengthening of this congregation and the larger church, ministering to the human need here and around the world, sustaining the search for truth in college and seminary, making known the gospel of life and hope wherever human hearts long for forgiving grace.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Ronald E. Osborn, from *The Gifts We Bring*, v.3, Ecumenical Stewardship Center

Charge and Benediction

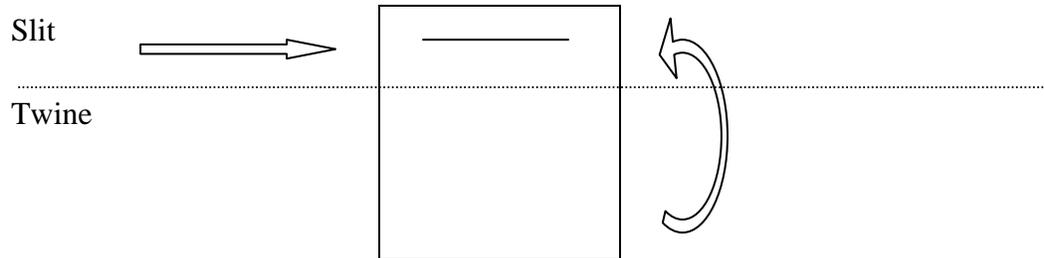
In the book *Doorways to the Soul*, there is a story of a rabbi stopping by a monastery that was not doing well and the monks were fighting among themselves because of it. The abbot asked advice from the rabbi but all he said is "The Messiah dwells among you here at the monastery." Because of this—because the monks did not know who among them was the Messiah—they began treating each other as if the other were the Messiah. People began to come back to the monastery and it began to thrive.

As you go about your week, treat everyone you meet as if he or she was the Messiah. For as Christian disciples, we believe that all are created in the image of God, and we are all Christ's brothers and sisters. Go and live like it and celebrate! Amen.

Additional Activities

I am a Christian Disciple Flag—Many people make prayer flags and this is an adaptation of that. Cut pieces of cloth (muslin or canvas works well and is inexpensive) about 10"x12". You can put a casing on one edge if you are going to string them together or put a dowel in them to hang. Then provide craft supplies and tools for people to decorate their flags: markers, fabric paints, glue, glue gun, buttons, pins, rick-rack and other trim, ribbons, etc. Have them write "I am a Christian Disciple" on them. Then they can draw, paint, glue or whatever to create an image that represents them as a Christian disciple. If they are to hang at the church, thread them through some twine and hang them to decorate your fellowship hall or Sunday school area. If they are going to take them home, you might use wooden kebab or wooden chopsticks as their

dowel to hang them with. If you cannot sew casings for the flags, you can simply cut a slit about an inch down from the top leaving an inch or two on either side of the flag (left arrow). Then hang the slit over the twine and thread the bottom of the flag through the slit (right arrow). This makes the flag loop over the thread and hold.



Christian Education Fair—Have a Sunday to set up tables around your fellowship hall group from your church gather to discuss having something for mission workers from your church to give to someone on the mission field. It may be a coffee cup with your church’s logo on it or a handcrafted item that one of your members has made. Be sure to think of its size and weight because that is usually an issue when packing for a trip. Have the church member giving the gift to be sure to take a picture of them with the recipient so that can be posted somewhere special at the church.

Commission Your Servants—Have the pastor set up a regular time in a worship service to commission those who are going to be working in Christian service. This can be those who work regularly in a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, a mission trip, as a volunteer at a local hospital, for a teacher, etc. Broaden the church’s idea of what it means to be a Christian servant. You might be surprised at those who are serving and those who would like to serve given the chance.