

A Liturgy for Bible Sunday
November 19, 2017
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Call to Worship

Leader: We gather as people who know both pain and praise.

People: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Leader: We gather with faith, yet burdened by uncertainties.

People: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Leader: We gather to sing, to pray, to listen, to learn.

People: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Leader: We gather seeking insight for the journey of life.

People: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

—based on Psalm 119:105

Call to Confession

Although we try to be faithful and fruitful believers, more often than not we find ourselves following the advice of the wicked and taking the paths of sinners. Instead of being anchored in God's nourishing instruction, we find ourselves blown about like restless leaves in the dead of winter. Once again we turn to God and acknowledge that striking out on our own hasn't worked so well, and we seek divine forgiveness and guidance.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

Righteous God, it is tempting for us to rush madly along in our daily routines knowing that if we slowed down our failures and inner selves would catch up with us, would haunt and torment us. But here, in this moment of naked encounter, we relent and acknowledge who we are: we have envied the strong and powerful and too often have turned our backs on the weak and needy; instead of caring for the widow, orphan, and foreigner we have followed the populist path of least resistance; we have not visited the sick and the lonely or fed the hungry and clothed the naked. We prefer closed and secure worlds where we see and hear only people just like ourselves. We are inclined to forget that you sent the good news of the gospel to *all* the world and not simply to us. In this time of honest encounter, we ask for your forgiveness and pray that you would yet again set our feet on the path of righteousness. Hear us, loving God, as we throw ourselves into the arms of your amazing grace. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

The gospels tell us that Jesus healed lepers, restored sight to the blind, and forgave sinners. So we have hope! Friends, believe the good news: In Christ Jesus we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

Prayer for Illumination

Great Teacher, as surely as the sun shines in the sky and the rivers flow to the sea, you are here among us—vibrant, pulsating, and holy. Speak to us, instruct us, and stir us to new life through the words of sacred scripture. Open our dim eyes and unstop our dull ears so that we might learn better how to be your faithful followers. Amen.

Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon

- Deuteronomy 17:14-20
- Psalm 1
- Matthew 5:17-20
- James 1:19-27

Prayers of the People

Wise God, we give you thanks for sacred scripture. Through its words we are instructed, nourished, comforted, discomfited, challenged, and moved. We thank you for the people who have taught us, through word and deed, the stories of the Bible: our parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, pastors, choirs, musicians, artists, and college and seminary professors. We are thankful for their dedication and ongoing efforts.

We also know that to be enlightened by scripture always opens our eyes to the world around us with all of its beauty and despair. In turn, we lift our voices in praise and lament. We rejoice in the life of a new born child; the gift of love; the marriage of two people in love; the gift of meaningful work; the blessing of friends and community; the grace we experience by a forgiving friend we've wronged; the beauty of the world around us. There is much that moves us to praise.

But there is much that leads us to lament. We hurt when we see the vigor of youth slowly replaced by painful and debilitating consequences of growing older; we grieve when we see the children savagely wounded and killed in wars created by adults who hate one another; we cry when we see innocent people fleeing the horror of war not of their own making, only to be greeted with suspicion and disdain by people who could offer help; we mourn when people we know lose their parents or children to death; we are pained when we see people whose only home is the streets while surrounded by so much affluence. There is much to lament. So we lift our voices on behalf of these, the least of your children. Move in your gracious and wise ways on their behalf, and instruct us how we might better be your agents of grace in a world filled with so much pain and need. In the name of Jesus, love incarnate, we pray. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

Upon being gifted by God, Miriam, Hannah, and Mary responded with acts and songs of praise. Along with them, as well as countless other people we meet in the Bible, we too are recipients of God's grace and love. It is right, then, that we respond with gifts and offerings.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Giving God, in our heart of hearts we know that all we have and all we are come from you. In this moment we cease our grasping, and acknowledge your gifts with our gifts. Bless them; bless us. Through your giving and our receiving, enable us in turn to be a blessing to all we meet. Amen.

Charge and Benediction

Today is Bible Sunday. But the Bible isn't just for Sunday.

Go forth from here to read, study, and live daily the stories in the Bible.

Be nourished by scripture like trees planted beside flowing streams.

Go forth and bear fruit.

And as you go, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.