

A Liturgy for Seminary Sunday

September 24, 2017

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Call to Worship

One: We come to worship the God who calls in the middle of the night.

Many: Here we are, God. Send us!

One: We come to worship the God who became flesh and lived as a teacher.

Many: Here we are, God. Send us!

One: We come to worship the God who educates us in classrooms from kindergarten to seminary and everywhere in between.

Many: Here we are, God. Send us!

One: We have come. Let us worship God.

Many: Speak Lord. Your servants are listening.

Call to Confession

Too often we hear God's voice but refuse to listen. Even more often we simply do not hear God because we are listening to the din of noise around us. In these confusing times, we sin and allow ourselves to be separated from the one who teaches us who we are. In these moments, we must confess, repent, and begin again. Join me as we confess before God and one another.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

Holy God, we rely on our own limited knowledge to walk daily through this life. We look in the mirror and convince ourselves that we are smart enough and good enough and that we don't need anyone else, much less you. We are ignorant, God. Forgive us. Enable us to acknowledge our own weaknesses so that we can be made strong through you. *(Time for silent confession)* Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

There is nothing that you or I can do that will make God love us any less. As we educate ourselves, we realize how little we know. As we come to this realization, we begin to rely on the only one we can rely upon. There is nothing we can do to make God love us any less. Through Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God! Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

God of the word, you teach us through the prophets of long ago and the professors of today. We long to know you as best we can. We know that reading your word is a part of that process. Make our minds and hearts ready to receive the word that you have for us now. Amen.

Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon

- Exodus 16:2-15 is a lectionary text for this Sunday. This is the story of the Israelites crying out in the desert for food and water. God provides both through the mysterious manna which appears each morning. A preacher could use this scripture to focus on the ways in which God provides for our needs—including our needs as congregations for educated men and women who can teach and preach the biblical texts with authority.
- Matthew 20:1-16 is also a lectionary text for this Sunday. A preacher could use a similar theme here. God will find the workers for the vineyard and God will provide work for every worker called. An analogy could be drawn between the vineyard and the seminary and/or vocation within the Church.
- 1 Samuel 3:1-10 is deviating from the lectionary and is the passage upon which this liturgy is based. It is the familiar call story of Samuel who is a young boy hearing God's voice for the first time. Important themes for seminary Sunday are found in this passage. A preacher can focus on the call itself, but also tie in the education which Samuel had received and continues to receive from Eli. Without Eli's guidance, Samuel would not have recognized or had the ability to live into his calling. This is our hope for a seminary education—which MTS is providing for men and women to live into their callings.

Prayers of the People

Call to prayer: As those called by God, we are invited to engage in ministry through prayer for ourselves, our community, and the world. Today we also pray especially for our seminary, Memphis Theological Seminary. There will be moments of silence throughout the prayer for you to offers your private prayers to God. Let us pray...

Holy and loving God, you call in the night and we get confused. You say our names and we want to just go back to sleep. We praise you for loving us so much that you awaken us to the needs of the world. Enable us to be mindful of the needs which are close to home and far away.

When the world as we know it was dark as night, you imagined something greater and spoke it into existence. It is so good, God, and we have not taken care of it. We pray for your creation—for trees, flowers, animals, the ocean—and we long to return it to what you first imagined. We pray for creation.

(Silence)

You call all nations to be in ministry alongside you, but we choose to fight over who is best or has the most or is the strongest. We pray for the nations of the world: that peace will come, that death due to starvation exists no longer, that leaders make decisions which help the people rather than continue systems of injustice and evil. We pray for all nations and their leaders.

(Silence)

We live in a nation that speaks of "One nation under God" and "In God we trust," but we do not treat one another in ways that embody those words. Rather than rising to answer your call, we roll over and pull the covers over our heads. You keep calling nonetheless

and provide us with all kinds of opportunities to do ministry alongside you as citizens of this country. We pray for our nation.

(Silence)

You call out to us to love our neighbor. We look around our city and ask, “Who is our neighbor?” We want to better serve the city in which we live. We want our city to be an example of living according to your will. Help our city and state leaders, our governor and mayor, city council persons, and all those who make decisions on our behalf. Wake them up to your will. We pray for our city.

(Silence)

From the first arguments between Peter and Paul, you have called your Church to be united. Make the universal Church a light in the dark world. Keep it from adding confusion to our society. Grant it the ability to share your love in every corner of the world as one body. We pray for the Church Universal.

(Silence)

Sometimes, God, we feel like our small church can't make that big of a difference. You call us to specific ministry at particular times and we want to answer that call with “Your servant is listening!” Give us ears to hear and eyes to see where you are leading our congregation. We pray for our church.

(Silence)

Today you have reminded us that it is important to educate men and women as they answer your call in their lives. We know that Memphis Theological Seminary is our seminary. We want to support the work that you are doing through it. We know that you will keep calling in the night. We know that ministers will continue to need to be educated in order to be the best they can be for you. We pray for those men and women called into ministry and for Memphis Theological Seminary.

(Silence)

We take time in our prayers, God, to remember how big the world is. We sit in silence to remember that you have called us to participate in global ways in what you are doing. Sometimes that is hard to remember, though. It is especially hard to remember when we or someone we love is hurting, sick, dying, or mentally ill. We pray for those now.

(Silence)

The ways in which you call us astound us, God. The ways in which you share your love with us keeps us up at night. The ways in which you allow us to minister alongside you makes us want to cry out, “Here I Am!” You are an amazing God. We praise you for

being such a personal God that we can bring all of this and so much more to you. We pray to you, God, in the name of Jesus, the Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

God has provided us with so much and the amazing thing is this. God invites us to join in the ministry, to actually work alongside God in this world! We do that in many and varied ways through our congregational life. One way we are invited to participate today is by giving a special gift to Memphis Theological Seminary on this Seminary Sunday. In addition to your normal giving to the congregation, you are invited to join God in the educating of men and women for all kinds of ministry all over the world. Give and give generously.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Generous and thoughtful God, thank you for calling us to work alongside you in ministry. May our time in our workplaces and in our volunteer activities reflect your generosity and caring. May these material financial gifts be used to serve you beyond these walls and out into the whole world. Bless these gifts. Bless us as we give. But, most of all, God, may we bless you in our giving and our living. Amen.

Charge and Benediction

As you go,
Go knowing that God is calling you.
Each of us is called. You are no exception.
Listen. You are charged to listen. Listen and obey.

As you do that, may the God who calls continue to speak.
May the Christ who saves continue to surprise.
And, may the Spirit who fills us continue to guide.
Today and every day. Amen.