

Alternative Worship Service During Synod

Introduction

One of the challenges of Synod is finding pulpit supply for Synod weekend. Paddy Eastwood and the congregation of Haney Presbyterian Church are pleased to share the service they prepared together in 2022. Paddy asked the congregation to share the hymns that enabled them to “Sing their faith” and then structured the service around their stories, matching Scripture, story and music. It is therefore a very personal service, sharing the testimony of members of Haney Presbyterian. Please feel to change it to suit your own congregation.

This service is designed for lay leadership. One person can lead all the parts of the service, or different people can do the prayers, the Scripture readings or the reflections.

We have done similar services at Haney many times: they are much loved services, full of joy and enthusiasm.

Complete Worship Service

Life and Work of the Congregation

Silent Prayer

GOD CALLS US, WE COME IN FAITH

Lighting the Christ Candle - Jesus said “I am the light of the World”

Call to Worship Psalm 150

¹ Praise the Lord.

**Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.**

² Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³ **Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,**

⁴ praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵ **praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.**

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

Singing

All People that on earth do dwell BP 65

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Ancient of days,
God of our everyday lives,
we praise you for your guidance and care in every generation,
and for the example of those who have gone before us,
who taught us your name and brought us to faith.
In the great mystery of your love,
we know these saints gather with,
to praise and adore you for
your wisdom that instructs,
your grace that redeems,
your Spirit who guides us, and for
the comfort and hope we claim
in the knowledge that neither death nor life
can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Gracious God,
you have been faithful to us in every generation.
Yet we confess that we are not so faithful to you.
We shrink from costly discipleship
and we seek cheap grace.
Forgive our fleeting enthusiasms
and our shallow commitments.
And guide us always
with the love and mercy we witness in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Dear friends, while it is true that we have all sinned,
It is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ.
Be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

Singing

I know not why such wondrous grace BP 683

GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN

Story Time -

Our Call to Worship this morning was Psalm 150. It's a psalm calling us to praise God with all sorts of instruments. If I could, I would have given everyone in the sanctuary a rhythm instrument to shake as we read together. Wouldn't that be a wonderful way to start worship? Lots of happy noise!

Music is a wonderful part of worship. In the songs we sing, God speaks to us and we speak to God. It's altogether glorious. Music has a way of going straight to our hearts. Today we are singing more songs than usual. I'm going to reflect on the Scriptures that connect to the hymns we are singing and I am going to share with you what the people told when they chose their hymns. I asked their permission to share their comments. Sharing our stories is another way we encourage each other in the faith.

Prayer – Hear us O Lord as we praise your name. Amen.

Visual Arts: God's people praise God around the world and across time. Draw a picture of God's People singing to God.

Prayer of Illumination

Loving God, We thank you for your holy Word. Send us your Spirit this day to open our minds and hearts to the word you have for us, in the name of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

Reading **Genesis 17. 1-8**

Reflection **Almighty God**

To address God as Almighty God is to refer to God's power, particularly God's creative power. God spoke and made our beautiful world. Here in BC, nestled among the mountains, we see the grandeur of what God has done. No wonder we feel close to God when we are outside, when we can see the trees, hear the birds and feel the wind. And science does not undercut or compete with our awareness or pleasure in God's power: it enriches it. Sit with God in silence and feel the blood circulating through your veins and remember the wonder of what is happening in our bodies all the time. God breathed his life into Adam and our bodies are the result. Our bodies are amazing. Sit with your grandchildren and watch the dew glittering on a spider web. Who taught the spider to weave a cord of such strength? God Almighty reminds us of the power of God at work among us.

So it is interesting that the first time God is called "Almighty God" is not in the stories of creation; it is in our text today. "El Shaddai" literally means, "God of the Mountain" and this God who created the mountains and all that we see, chooses to come down to Abraham and start making promises. By the end of the chapter, everyone, God, Abram and Sarai will have new names and a new hope.

In the words of Karl Barth, “Reconciliation is the restitution, the resumption of a fellowship which once existed but was then threatened by dissolution” (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV/1, 22). God promises not only to restore God’s relationship with Israel, through Abraham and his descendants, but with the nations. The scope of God’s redemptive work is global, planted in the midst of a very specific people.

This is all God’s doing. notice verse 8 where it says,

“The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” (Genesis 17. 8)

Did your mind finish that phrase? “I will be their God and they will be my people.” The Scriptures often put those two phrases together but not here. In this text, the emphasis is completely on God and God’s grace and mercy reaching out to the nations.

“I will be your God.” This everlasting covenant extends to Israel through Abraham, and through Israel to the church, and through the church to each of one of us.

In this text, God is given a new name: El Shaddai, God of the mountain, God Almighty. Abram is renamed, “Ancestor of multitudes.” Sarai is renamed, “Princess.” These names reveal their identity. As God did for Abraham and Sarah, God names each of us for who we truly are for in your baptism you have been given a new name, “disciple of Jesus Christ,” “beloved child of God.”

One of our members suggested the song, El Shaddai as the song that encouraged her faith. She wrote,

I really like the song - El Shaddai. When I sing it, it is as if I am worshipping God with the Israelite people when they praised God. It reminds me of how faithful God has been and continues to be to us, of how much He loves us and that we can rely on Him - He never changes.

We will be singing three phrases in Hebrew. We can do this!

El Shaddai (God Almighty)

El Elyon na Adonai (the Most High God, O Lord) “We beseech Thee” is understood

Er kam ka na Adonai (We will love you O Lord)

Singing

El Shaddai

Eternal Father, strong to save 325 vss 1,4

O Lord my God/How Great Thou Art 332 vss 1,3

Reading 1 Peter 1. 3-9
Reflection God of hope

The opening of this reading is the gospel in a nutshell. The first word is praise because God acts toward us in mercy, and thus we are enabled to act in joy. 1 Peter 1 overflows with joy and praise for what God has done, what God is doing and what God promises for the future.

Three times in seven verses, the author uses the word, “faith.” What is the faith of which he speaks?

John Calvin and the early reformers of the 16th century emphasized that faith consists of both knowledge and deep trust in God’s goodness. According to the Heidelberg Confession of 1563 true faith “is not only a certain *knowledge* by which I accept as true all that God has revealed...but also a wholehearted *trust* which the Holy creates in me through the gospel, that, not only others, but to me also God has given the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, out of sheer grace solely for the sake of Christ’s saving work.” (Heidelberg Confession, question 21). Faith is more than just intellectual assent to what the church teaches. It includes personal reliance on God’s grace.

In the 20th century, Karl Barth expanded our discussion of the nature of faith by focusing on the *object* of faith, our triune God. Beyond our personal trust, Barth taught us to focus on the object, or the person that we trust. Faith focuses on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

In the words of a member of our community, “My Story” is the song that has had a significant impact on my walk in faith with Christ.” Listen to how this song describes what God has done for us: hope that wouldn’t let go, love that never gave up, grace that is greater than all my sin, victory over the enemy, freedom that was won for me, life overcoming the grave.

No wonder we sing, “Praising our Saviour all the day long.”

Singing

My Story anthem, solo, or congregation verse 1, chorus, verse 2, chorus

Blessed Assurance 687 vss 1, 3 chorus verse 1, chorus, verse 3, chorus

Reading Psalm 40. 1-5
Reflection Faithful God

The heart of Psalm 40 is the truth that God hears our cries and delivers us from times of trouble. We are not told the precise nature of the psalmist’s troubles. He experienced them

as a slimy pit, as mud and mire. Whatever the details, the psalmist ultimately sings a song of joy, a new song of praise to our God.

Only it isn't just a song to God. Verses 9-10 make it clear that this is more than a private pondering of the faithfulness of God:

I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips, Lord,
as you know.
I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.
I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness
from the great assembly. Psalm 40. 9-10

Psalm 40 is the psalmist's testimony. It is his story of what the Lord has done for him.

The word, 'testimony' makes some people nervous. We associate it with aggressive evangelism and we have no desire to be offensive. And yet... this psalmist shows us another way. He simply declares, "Here is what happened to me."

This Psalmist is not the only one who has a story of God's rescue, of God's faithfulness. This sanctuary holds a living catalogue of redemption songs. And as we hear each other's story of rescue, each one of us takes hope that we too will sing a new song of praise.

Hear the testimony of two of our members.

One piece that I have appreciated is "He will hold me fast." In my own life I have had dry periods where I had trouble feeling God's presence with me, but I knew that I just needed to hang on and God would be there to help me through this temporary difficulty. I have also appreciated the fact that God does not let our children go, especially those who have made genuine commitments to follow Him, even if they aren't living for Him at present. There is hope for the future if we are always praying.

The song in my head all this past summer has been Love Lifted Me. I don't even know if this is a hymn. I can't recall ever hearing it in church but it's there in my head. I know it's about sinking deep in sin and the words are lovely but there are other things I sink into, like fear and despair. I have been so sick this year, so much pain, so unsteady on my feet. I never knew what was next, so afraid of falling again. I've had to force myself to do simple tasks I always took for granted. I would sit at the bus stop fairly confident my legs would get me home and then panic! How am I going to get up the stairs? Love Lifted Me: that's how. I would sing my way up the stairs. It's like God Himself lifted me one step at a time. "When nothing else could help, love lifted me" the song says, and I believe it! God's love keeps me going and holds me close. That song says it all!

Singing

He will hold me fast vss 1, 2

Love Lifted Me vss 1,2

Reading Philippians 2. 5-11

Reflection God Crucified

So which is more important, Christmas or Easter? Christmas celebrates the Incarnation, God entering human history to reclaim the world as God's own. Easter celebrates the resurrection. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead! Hallelujah! These are both seasons of joy, with many traditions associated with them. We spend our whole lives deepening our understanding of what God has done and what it means for us personally, for the Church, indeed for the whole world. Our liturgical life is built around these seasons: God's coming to us; Christ's resurrection; life with the Holy Spirit.

Christmas and Easter are the anchors for our lives together as God's people.

Yet without Easter, there would be no Christmas. Jesus would have lived a good life as a faithful Jewish rabbi, but then he would have died, an example to us but nothing more. No, the event that changes everything is that empty tomb on Easter morning.

Easter is not a stand-alone event. Without Good Friday, there would be no Easter. Without Christ's death, Christ cannot be resurrected.

Good Friday, God's Friday is a hard day for us. The stories of Holy Week are ominous, full of betrayal and treachery, overwhelming grief and loss. It's tempting to just jump over the Friday. We'd like it if we could sing "Hosanna, Glad Hosanna" followed by "Jesus Christ is risen today" and leave "O Sacred head, sore wounded" out altogether.

The truth is sometimes our lives have more in common with Good Friday than with Easter Sunday. We too can be lost and grieving. We have been betrayed by those we trusted and sometimes our bodies are wracked with pain.

At those times, we need to hear the truth of Philippians 2, that Jesus Christ humbled himself as human being, humbled himself even to death on the cross.

God chose to align himself so completely with the limitations of humanity that He became one of us, experiencing all that we know as humans; yes, the joy and laughter and pleasures of this life but also its sorrow, weeping and pain. Jesus Christ is with you in your suffering.

Shadrach Meshach Lockridge was a prominent African-American Baptist minister in San Diego, California, very active in the civil rights movement. He was renowned for his powerful preaching. You can find him on YouTube. His Good Friday sermon, and I'm sorry I

was not able to find the date when he preached it, had the following refrain: “It’s Friday, but Sunday’s coming.”

The person who requested that we sing *Because He lives* commented, “when I am trying to convince myself that life is worth living.”

Singing

Because He Lives vss 1, chorus, 3, chorus

The Old Rugged Cross chorus, vs 1, chorus, vs 2, chorus

WE RESPOND, GOD HEARS OUR PRAYERS

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession and Lord’s Prayer

God who calls throughout the ages,
we give thanks that you have spoken to your people in every generation,
calling them into the light,
showing them the paths of justice,
guiding them out of the bondage into freedom.
In every age, you have called leaders to guide your people with courage and insight,
speaking through them to offer comfort and challenge.
We give you thanks for your Holy Spirit,
who offers the gift of faith to us,
and for the ways that those who came before us have handed that faith on to us.
As we give thanks for all that we have received,
remind us that we are but a small part of your creation, its history, life and love.
May such a reminder keep us humble in our mission,
even as you call us to take up our place
in the ongoing story of your love with courage and creativity.

Hold a few seconds of silence.

Hear our prayers, O God, for your church in this place and around the world.
Sustain and support the work of the Gospel.
Where the church is in physical danger, protect it with your Spirit.
Where the church is facing division, unify it through your love.
Where the church lacks courage to stand up for justice,
embolden it with example of those saints who have gone before us.
Where the church lacks energy or vision,
renew its hope in the presence of Christ who is with us always.

Hold a few seconds of silence.

God of the past, the present, and what is still to come
We thank you today for all those saints who have shown us how to love each other,

and for those who still touch people in trouble with tenderness,
caring for the sick, cheering the lonely, helping the poor.
In this quiet moment, we remember those around us who need a saint
to reach out to them in their need this day:

Keep silence for 15 – 20 seconds

Give each of us the courage and compassion to be your saints alive today,
touching the world in Jesus' name, as we pray in the words he taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Singing The church's one foundation BP 479 vss 1, 2,5

GOD SENDS US WITH HIS BLESSING, WE GO IN FAITH

A Blessing

You are loved.
Go out and serve the Lord,
trusting always in the power of the Holy Spirit
working among you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
rest upon you now and forever.
Amen.

***Singing Amazing Grace BP670 vss 1, 6**

For your reflection: This week, how will you praise God?