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Worship Resources for

Stewardship Sunday

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Theme: Invited to Live Generously

Texts: John 1: 43-51
 1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Hymnals: *Sing the Story* (see www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/447 to borrow or purchase)
 Sing the Journey (see www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/70)
 Hymnal: A Worship Book (see www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/502)
 My Money Talks Songbook (see www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/808)

Introduction

These resources for worship are designed to assist you in planning for Stewardship Sunday. The resources are based on two of the Lectionary texts for the day and attempt to connect the theme of stewardship with the season of Epiphany.

In the season of Epiphany, we particularly reflect on the “aha!” moments of encounter with Jesus Christ, *God With Us*. This story is rooted in a long history of God inviting us into relationship. So there is already an “aha!” moment for Eli, in the text from the Hebrew Scriptures, that prompts him to encourage Samuel to respond directly to God’s call. The text in the Gospel of John includes several of these “aha!” moments through which generosity is expressed as Jesus expands his invitation to relationship.

We sometimes approach stewardship of our resources, both financial and otherwise, as obligations that we need to fulfill. Is it possible to transform that sense of obligation to an attitude of generosity? In worship we have the opportunity to encounter God and respond to Jesus’ invitation to “Come and see.” When we experience our own “aha!” moments with the Divine, we are bound to respond to God’s generosity to us with gratitude.

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 3:11

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Mary Jo Leddy in her book, *Radical Gratitude*, (Orbis Books, 2002, 68; see www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/803 for a loan copy), describes Jesus as the example of what it means to live in radical gratitude. She writes:

In the life of Jesus we see someone whose life gave weight to his words. Jesus knew that he had been born of God, that he was a child of God... The recognition that he had been born of God led him freely and simply to give – to give of himself and of his things.

This past fall in Winnipeg, the Jewish Federation launched a billboard and bus bench ad campaign for the Combined Jewish appeal. Rather than depending on stunning graphics, the campaign was simply white words on a blue background that read: *Live Generously*. In Jesus we find the model of how to live generously – it is our turn to respond to the invitation.

GATHERING

Suggested songs:

STJ 6 *Jesus, we are here*

STJ 42 *Listen, God is calling*

STS 5 *Open my ears, open my eyes*

Call to Worship:

God still calls his children by name.

If we open our ears, like Samuel did, we may hear it.

If we open our eyes and hearts, like the first disciples,

we may be surprised and delighted at what Jesus invites us to “come and see.”

And if we open our skeptical minds like Nathanael did,

we may be amazed at our encounter with the Son of God.

So come, with open ears, and eyes and hearts, ready to listen and encounter.

Come and worship.

PRAISING

Suggested songs:

STJ 18 *Over my head*

STS 28 *Holy Child within the manger*

STS 34 *You are holy*

CONFESSING

Suggested litany of confession:

STJ 132

Prayer of Agur, by Bryan Moyer Suderman from *My Money Talks* songbook.

Download free at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/804.

HEARING GOD'S WORD

Children's story

Adapted from a children's story by Michelle Stoesz of Winnipeg.

Supplies: a wrapped package with a mirror inside; a bow, stickers and hearts.

Story: God's Good Gifts

Come and see what I've got. It is a very special gift; a gift from God for the world. I want to share it with you by letting you peek inside. When you see what is inside, please don't let anyone else know what you see. We will talk about it once everyone has had a chance to see it for themselves. (Open up the box and let each child see him/herself in the mirror.)

What did you see? You saw yourselves? How is that a gift from God for the world? (Encourage a few responses.)

We are gifts from God for the world because God made us, so that God can bless others through us. At Christmas, we celebrated that God gave us Jesus. On Epiphany, two Sundays ago, we celebrated the gifts the Wise men brought to Jesus. Today we will hear that as a grown up Jesus invites people to "come and see" and to follow him. Jesus knew he was God's special gift to the world and that's how he lived his life. After Jesus said, "come and see," he also said, "follow me," and, "live like me." That means, as friends and followers of Jesus, we are special gifts from God to the world, too.

Let's look at each other as a pile of presents. What do we look like? Are we all the same? No. We have different colours of skin, of eyes, of hair. We come in different sizes, too. God delights in variety and made each of us a little different, so that each of us can bless the world in a little different way, by sharing the things we like to do and the things we have with others. Some of us enjoy reading, some of us enjoy running and playing sports, some of us enjoy painting and making crafts. God made us with our special interests and abilities so that we can help each other and share God's love in different ways. That's how we can be gifts of God to the world.

Will someone who is good at tying bows, please help me put a bow on this box? The rest of you can help by taking a sticker and sticking it onto this box. It will remind us of the gifts God has given us and wants us to be for others. You can take another sticker and a heart back to your seat with you. While you are worshiping with us, draw a picture on the heart. God gave you all your own special ways of drawing. I would like all of you

to share your gifts with the whole church in that way. When the worship time is over you can come and drop it through the slit in this box.

Wondering questions:

- I wonder how God could create so many different people gifts.
- I wonder what would happen if everyone thought of themselves as a gift from God to the world.
- I wonder how God wants me to share my gifts.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for making each one of us with special gifts. Help us share those gifts with others and so we can help the world be the way you want it. Amen.

Sermon Starters

In today's text from 1 Samuel, we often focus on the call of Samuel. From another perspective, Samuel may not have "heard" that call had it not been for Eli. For his part, Eli might have been tempted to hoard access to God – after all, he was the priest. But when "Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy" he was able to free and encourage Samuel to respond to God.

In the section just preceding today's suggested Gospel text, John the Baptist, like Eli, who had already had his "aha!" moment with Jesus, gave opportunity for his disciples to see for themselves. Following Jesus' invitation to John's disciples to, "come, and you will see," Andrew had his "aha!" moment and went to find his brother Simon. When Philip, too, has his "aha!" moment and decides to find Nathanael, Nathanael has some trouble contemplating that anything good can come from Nazareth. Rather than coerce Nathanael or argue with him, Philip passes along Jesus' invitation to "Come and see." And then in an encounter with Jesus, Nathanael also has his "aha!" moment.

As Jesus freely gives of himself in invitation to those who would follow, those who really "see" him expand the invitation to others because they, too, want to spread the good news. The invitation of Jesus to all of us is to live generously as he lived. This is a challenge in our material world. How do we give of ourselves in the midst of economic uncertainty and challenge? Can we trust God to provide? We may at some points wish that the Bible simply required all Christians to give a certain percentage of their income to the church, in order that we are not left to wonder how much is enough. Would there be any joy in that?

We are invited to give because God has given us everything that we have. We have the invitation to come and see all that God provides. As we find our own "aha!" moments and invite others to join us in discovering Jesus, giving will be caught and multiplied.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Suggested songs:

HWB 507 *Gracious Spirit, dwell with me*

HWB 395 *Here I am, Lord*

STJ 32 *If you believe and I believe*

STJ 14 *Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey*

STS 35 *Thou, O Christ, my Lord and King*

Offering Prayers and songs:

STJ 148 or STS 140

HWB 383 *God whose giving*

HWB 387 *Lord, thou dost love*

HWB 388 *Grant us, Lord, the grace*

I can give with joy; by Bryan Moyer Suderman, from his CD *My money talks*

www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/809).

BLESSING AND SENDING

God, the source of generosity,
has given us all we have.
God has called us together as his body on earth
and ignites in us the joy of giving.
God sends us now to serve
with generous and joy-filled living.

Suggested song:

HWB 478 *Sent forth by God's Blessing*