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Worship resources for

World Communion Sunday 2009

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INTRODUCTION

World Communion Sunday is an opportunity for the wider Christian Church to move beyond historical and theological differences and worship together in active hope of genuine unity in Christ, even while we recognize and confess that separating walls remain high, and truly ecumenical Communion remains rare. May it help us live into the unity God has already given the church.

Scripture Focus: Isaiah 43: 1-7 and 16-21.

Suitable Songs from

Hymnal: A Worship Book(HWB), Sing the Journey(STJ), and Sing the Story(STS):

HWB 22 Lord Jesus Christ, be present now
HWB 421 Bless'd be the tie that binds
HWB 454 Seed, scattered and sown
HWB 459 I come with joy to meet my Lord
HWB 640 This is a day of new beginnings
STJ 87 Put peace into each other's hands
STS 34 You are holy
STS 60 Come to me, come to us
STS 77 Here is the bread

Suggested congregational responses appear in bold.

GATHERING

Isaiah 43:19 (read in unison)

**See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.**

Lord we have come to worship
old and young, rich and poor, happy and discontented,
at peace and restless, more or less full of faith, we come.

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

We come curious about this “new thing” that you can do...

Can you sustain our world through financial meltdown?

Can you sustain our world through devastating environmental change?

Can you sustain our world through the valleys of violence and bloodshed?

We need a way through the wasteland parts of our lives.

In this hour of worship, help us to perceive your power.

You are here for all of us with streams of living water—
cold, refreshing, abundant, unstoppable.

Hallelujah! **Amen.**

CONFESSION

As a sign of unity with members of the church through time and around the world, the congregation says the **Apostle’s Creed, 712 Hymnal: A Worship Book.**

CHILDREN’S STORY: “ON THE WAY TO CHURCH”

I passed (two) churches on the way to this church...did any of you pass by a church when you drove or walked to church today? (*Converse with them about this.*) Why didn’t you go to that church? This is the church your mom or dad or caregivers choose to come to...for many reasons (*list a few; example...grew up in this denomination, had friends here, attracted to the way they preached the gospel*).

We choose to be in one church, but it’s not because it’s the best church, or the most faithful church, or the only right church. All Christian churches believe in God who created us, Jesus who saves us, and the Spirit who helps us or sustains us...but we talk about this in different ways, and we worship God in different ways. Jesus’ church keeps surprising us with the many ways there are of being the church, ways we can’t even imagine.

Today we are celebrating World Communion Sunday. That means we are celebrating the world-wide church...the ways it is different and beautiful, and the way God works in different ways in all the different churches in the world.

In case you didn’t notice on your way here, on your way home, keep your eyes peeled for all the different churches in your neighbourhood. God is at work and is being worshiped in every church.

Prayer: Thank you God for so many churches and that we can worship you in so many ways. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Thank you for your Spirit which sustains our world,
connecting us more surely than any world wide web,
binding us together more closely than any cable could.

**Thank you for the beauty of the church with all its denominations,
with people of every colour, nation, and culture.**

Thank you for beautiful music of languages and our ability to learn them.
Thank you for the beauty of worship in many forms.

Thank you for the beauty of this world which feeds our souls.

Thank you for beauty of compassion which moves us to action
when we see our brothers and sisters in need,
whether they be next door or on the other side of the globe.

In this spirit of beauty, today we pray for those we know who are hungry or afraid,
especially...

Today we pray for those who face violence, especially...

Today we pray for those who are working for peace, and for those who need to work for peace, especially... *(include mission workers and names of national leaders)*

Lord, you are doing a new thing in our world,
you are working in ways we can hardly imagine.

Thank you for your vision, which is greater than our own.

Help us to put our trust in you,
our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, and Friend.

(and now we continue together with the prayer Jesus taught us.)

Lord's Prayer (a contemporary version appears in HWB, #731)

The Lord's Prayer as preparation for communion is another sign of solidarity with Christian churches around the world. Invite people to kneel at their seats if they are able. Kneeling during prayer, which we may consider as a liturgical church tradition, was an early Anabaptist custom though it has been less of a custom in more recent years.

OFFERING PRAYER

Invitation to the offering:

God calls us to be generous
not when all the bills are paid,
not when we have all that we need,
not when we see our way clearly;
God calls us to be a generous people now,
in this moment,
trusting ourselves to the care and provision of God.
Let us continue our worship with giving our tithes and offerings.

BLESSING THE OFFERING:

Lord, with this action of offering we tell your story,
how you sustain your church from generation to generation.
You deal generously with us, you give great gifts!
Your goodness is everlasting, lasting forever.
Accept the gifts of our hands and the thankfulness of our hearts.
Hearts and hands and voices around the world, all lifted in praise to you. **Amen.**

SERMON OUTLINE

Text: Isaiah 43:1-7, 16-21

Some of these verses are very familiar, often read at Christmas. We rarely put ourselves in the shoes of the first listeners to these texts. Why do we need to know their context? Why is the history important for understanding the words?

INTRODUCTORY EXAMPLE:

Consider Winston Churchill's famous words, "This is Britain's finest hour." One can't understand these words unless one understands what was happening in Britain in 1940. That year could also be seen as Britain's darkest hour—a time of great fear and anxiety. Most of Western Europe was

overrun by Hitler's troops. France had just fallen. There was a massive evacuation of troops from Dunkirk and a very real fear that England would soon be invaded, and face Hitler's tyranny. It was in this context that Winston Churchill stood up in the House of Commons and said, with conviction, "We are not in any way defeated... people looking back will say that this was our finest hour!" His voice of hope carried a vision of Britain's strength and courage.

Just as history gives depth to the famous words, the selected words from Isaiah need a historical context. Israel was a divided kingdom. Judah had the capital Jerusalem in it, but it was a very tiny country, smaller than Ontario's Niagara Peninsula. It was a small country in the midst of very strong and powerful neighbours. In the 100 years before today's Isaiah text, the country had fallen repeatedly into the hands of the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the Babylonians.

Judah had tried to throw off its oppressors by siding with allies who they hoped would treat them well, but Judah's leaders invariably chose the weakest link. At the time this text was written, the country had known only war, invasion, and powerlessness for several generations. Then things got worse. The Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, came, smashed Jerusalem, and deported many people to Babylon. The people who were left behind had nothing, no temple, no crops; they were poor, disoriented, and starving. Things had turned from bad to worse, and many people scattered into other countries.

Into this darkest hour the writer of this part of Isaiah wrote these startling, hopeful words of comfort: "Have no fear. I am with you." "I will gather you together." "I will do a new thing."

The preacher can easily segue from the example and scriptural context to the congregational context with statements such as: Are you facing a darkest hour? Is the congregation grieving or worrying about someone who is sick? How do the words of Isaiah hit us in our darkest hour? This could be followed by a segue into the darkest hour they feel the worldwide church is facing: environmental crisis, economic collapse, or the church losing relevance and members.

Wonder together about some, or all of these questions: How is God doing a new thing? How can God use the church today to bring love and peace into the world? How do these words of Isaiah inspire us? What new words of hope do we need to speak into our context? Does our church community have the courage to speak hopeful words, to live in hope, expecting to see the new things God is doing?

WORDS OF INVITATION

You are invited to the Lord's Table. Those who are baptized and have committed their life to Christ may come and take the bread and the juice/wine. Everyone, including children, is invited to come and take grapes as a sign of God's love.

As we come to the Lord's Table today, we remind ourselves that this is not our congregation's table, it is not a Mennonite table, it is the table of Jesus Christ, who invites us to a feast prepared for all God's people. God invites people from all highways and byways to come to this meal.

We are invited to this table of our Lord with churches from all Christian denominations and on all continents. We join together with Christians in Zimbabwe, Palestine, Korea, Columbia, Germany, Australia, China, and Mexico [substitute with countries significant to your context].

The Lord's Table offers us unity even in our diversity. Think of churches you have visited, or Christians you have met who have challenged you with their diversity. [Invite people to name these churches out loud; eg. "We join with the Anglican church in... Arusha, Tanzania."]

We join with all God's children at this Table to find life in Jesus Christ, and to be sustained for the journey ahead.

COMMUNION PRAYER:

Thank you, Lord, for the people you bring to this Table,
brothers and sisters in Christ.
We come to this table, knowing that God created us and loves us all.
We come to this table, knowing that Jesus died for us all.
We come to this table, knowing that God's Spirit sustains us all.
We come to this table, to experience the mystery of our faith,
Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Gracious God, thank you for this meal
which you have prepared for all your children.
Thank you for the gift of your son,
for his birth, his life, his death and his resurrection which are for our salvation.
As we come to the table, grace us with your Holy Spirit
so that we can understand the wideness of your love.
You unite our congregation with other congregations around the world.
We are one people, one body, your Church
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

We come to this table remembering that on the night before he died, Jesus gathered his friends.
He blessed the bread and broke it and gave it to them with the words,
"Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Each time you do this, remember me."
Then Jesus took a cup of wine, and gave thanks for it and passed it to his friends, saying,
"Drink this cup. This cup, poured out for you, is the promise of God.
Whenever you drink it, remember me."

Share the bread and wine/juice with the words: The body of Christ, broken for you.
The blood of Christ, shed for you.

Benediction: Go into your week with your eyes peeled for the new thing that God is about to do
in our lives. Come, Lord Jesus! **Amen.**