**Worship Plan for Mediated Joint Worship Services**

**August 2, 2020**

**GATHERING**

*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.*

**Introduction**

Hello, and welcome to our mediated joint worship of the Nith Valley Ministry Area, for Sunday, August 2, the 9th Sunday after Pentecost.

This is our 3rd week of mediated worship, and it is a wonderful way for the NVMA to share not only a time of worship but also a time of community, partnership, and building relationships with one another. Even though we may still be physically distanced and isolated from one another, we are united by the power of the Holy Spirit and give thanks that we are able to share our love of God, and our time, talents, and resources together.

Our worship service today includes prayers, scripture, a sermon reflection, and music. We will also celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. If you haven’t done so already, please take a moment now to gather some bread and wine or juice into your worship space at home.

Today’s worship service will be led by our preacher, Pastor Jennifer from Bethany, Woodstock, our musicians the Ernewein family, from the NVMA Shared Ministry Parish at St. James, Baden, and reader Chris from Zion, Philipsburg. I am Pastor Leanne from Zion, Philipsburg and I am the liturgist today.

Once again, a warm welcome to all who have joined us for worship today. May you find spiritual strength and sustenance here for your week ahead. I invite you now to prepare your hearts and minds for worship.

**Invitation to Worship**

Although apart, we are not alone.  We gather for worship, joined in God's presence, with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.  We must admit that we have wandered from God's presence during the past week and been distracted by many things. We ask God to have mercy on us and help us as we seek to re-centre our lives on the life of Jesus.  Amen.

**Greeting**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**Prayer of the Day\***

Gracious God, in love you created us, and in love you sustain us. You weep for your children who find themselves in bondage: those forced into slavery or prostitution, those oppressed by governments and economic systems, those enslaved by personal addictions, those who struggle to raise their children in the midst of violence or poverty. Give us: the ***courage*** of the ancient Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, the ***strength*** of Moses’ and Miriam’s mother, Jochbed, the ***creativity*** of Miriam, and the ***compassion*** of Pharaoh’s daughter, Bithiah to refuse to participate in violence and in systems of injustice, regardless of personal consequences. And if it is we ourselves who are the oppressors, guide our hearts and minds, that we would break free from cycles of violence and anger and find empathy for our victims. Make us your body here and now, so that your kin-dom come, and your will be done. Amen.

**WORD**

*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.*

**Reading** *Exodus 1:15-22, 2:1-10*

*Response: Word of God, word of life. Thanks be to God.*

**Psalm** *Psalm 150*

**Sermon- Pastor Jennifer Hoover, Bethany Lutheran, Woodstock**

**Genesis 1**

*At first, there was only darkness. A formless void covered the deep. And a wind from God swept over the waters.*

*And then there was light, piercing through the darkness, but only the wind could be heard.*

*A dome arose in the midst of the waters: sky, vast and still. Dry land appeared, yet the only sound was the lonely howling of the wind from God.*

*Then, on that third day, the earth put forth vegetation. Plants yielded seed, and trees bore fruit. The wind from God rustled branches and whispered through leaves and swished tall blades of grass.*

*On the fifth day the waters brought forth swarms of creatures, and birds flew above the earth. Their squawking and shrieking, chirping and cheeping, cawing, clucking, and crowing filled the air. The creatures multiplied and filled the earth.*

*On the sixth day the earth brought forth creatures of every kind. Cattle and creeping things and wild animals. And humankind. The earth was teeming with life: lush, bountiful, fruitful, prolific. The breath of life reverberated through all creation. God blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.*

**Exodus 1**

*The total number of people born to Jacob was 70. Then Joseph died and all his brothers, and that whole generation. But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was full of them.*

*When a new king arose over Egypt, he said, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us.”*

*But the more they were oppressed, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the Egyptians became ruthless.*

Two stories of beginnings. The first, a creation story from Genesis 1. The second, a story of Israel’s beginning from Exodus 1. Perhaps you noticed that both of these creation stories use similar language: words like multiply and fruitful, increase and prolific. While the same words are used in both stories, the pictures they paint are diametrically opposite.

Genesis 1 imagines a prolific paradise, but the very same words in Exodus describe the Israelites’ growth as an infestation from the perspective of Egypt’s new king. In fact, the first chapter of Exodus completely turns the first chapter of Genesis on its head. From the Pharaoh’s perspective, teeming and swarming and multiplying do not point to abundant blessing, but rather to the Pharaoh’s deep fear of being taken advantage of (and ultimately overtaken) by the refugees from Israel. The Genesis sense of awe and wonder is replaced in Exodus by fear and contempt. In Genesis, to have dominion over the earth and its creatures is to bear responsibility for careful stewardship; in Exodus, dominion is about exploitation and corrupt power. The God of Genesis is a divine creator who invites humanity into the work of tending lovingly to relationships. The Pharaoh of Exodus is a tyrant.

And perhaps the Pharaoh of Exodus is a stand-in for every tyrant history has ever encountered. Like every tyrant, the Pharaoh acts out of both fear of and contempt for the vulnerable people under his control. To a tyrant, these people are considered subhuman, and their humanity is to be suppressed, if not fully destroyed.

So, the tyrant Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites with forced labour. The Israelites made bricks and constructed supply cities and and worked in the fields, building the very economy that benefited their oppressors. But the more the Israelites were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.

And so, it came to be that the oppressor called upon two particular women, Shiphrah and Puah, who served as midwives to the Israelite women, to kill all the baby boys born to the Hebrew women. It seemed that nothing short of a slaughter of innocents could quell the Pharaoh’s fear of losing his power.

But the hands of midwives do not-cannot-kill. Their hands have “measured the growth of life/ and documented the stalling of time./They guide my ears to the places where I hear/The watch-like beat of tiny hearts./My hands have felt the hard bony framework of passages/and the softness of muscles/Which will bulge like the petals of a rose.” *(The Hands of a Midwife by Jan Weingrad)* <https://midwivesofnj.com/hands-midwife-poem/> *accessed July 26)*

Shiphrah and Puah, they did not do as the king commanded, but they let the baby boys live. And when the king questioned them, they lied. They told the king that, unlike the Egyptian women, the Hebrew women were vigorous and gave birth before the midwife arrived.

Their courageous act of civil disobedience changed history, for one of the boys that was spared would be called Moses, and he would lead the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity. He would deliver God’s law to the Israelites and bring them to the gate of the Promised Land. And it all started here, with two midwives named Shiphrah and Puah, willing to say “no” to an act of injustice. I doubt very much they thought they were changing the world. But they were, just by being faithful, by following the dictates of their hearts, by heeding the call of conscience.

You have likely heard of the “butterfly effect”. It’s a theory that a single occurrence, no matter how small, can change the course of the universe forever. In other words, our interactions are so interconnected that even the simplest efforts can have extraordinary impact.

The things we do each day-our actions, decisions, choices-ripple out with consequences foreseen and unforeseen, for good or for ill, for the health or damage of the world. What we do makes a difference. Some of our actions may be big, bold, and courageous. Others may be small and hardly noticeable. And yet they all have the potential to ripple out, affecting countless lives… for better or for worse.

You and I know how oppressive and ruthless the ways of the Pharaoh and the world can be, how easy it can be to act out of fear when we see others who are “more numerous and powerful than we”. When we act out of fear, we conform to the way of fear: hoarding rather than sharing, being greedy rather than generous, turning inward to protect ourselves rather than turning out to advocate for those who are vulnerable.

And we also know how liberating the way of God’s kingdom is: when we choose humility over arrogance, responsibility over recklessness, compassion over moral blindness, and when we choose to risk love in the face of Pharaonic insanity.

May we recognize and have the courage to name aloud the Pharaohs of our day-the ways in which our culture perpetuates Pharaoh’s ancient patterns of oppression borne out of the fear and contempt of “the other”. Once we recognize those places and people in our lives, may the risky love of Shiphrah and Puah-those practitioners of faith, hope, love, and new life-help us understand where real power lies, and give us courage to shape a hopeful and vibrant future for this and all generations to come. Amen.

*(Silence for reflection follows sermon. Visual is candle with the following verse)*

*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

**Prayers of Intercession**

Though we pray separately in our homes, we are united in the Spirit. Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us intercede together for the church, for the earth, and for all who are in need, responding to each petition with **hear our prayer.** *A brief silence.*

We pray for churches and communities of faith around our vast world and diverse world. Guide bishops, pastors, deacons, and church leaders as they lead and serve congregations in these uncertain times. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your wonderful creation, for forests and trees, for mountains and valleys, for rivers and oceans, and all who abide within. Bless fields, gardens, and orchards, bringing gentle rain and warm sunshine to nourish crops, vegetables, and fruits. Guide us to be loving caretakers of your creation. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the nations and countries of the world. Empower world leaders to lead with passion, empathy, and justice to bring an end to racism, war, poverty, greed, and hate. Give us courage, strength, creativity, and compassion to do your will in the world. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who suffer from illness and injury of the body, spirit, or mind. Bring food and shelter to those who are hungry and homeless and healing and hope to all who suffer from addiction. Be with those who struggle with depression, anxiety, and uncertainty in these times. We remember those we name before you now (*pause)*. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our congregations as they discern their return to worship. Guide committees and leaders as opening plans and protocols are established. Help us continue to reach out to one another with love and care, including members who are in long term care and retirement homes. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your saints whom you have gathered as one, united in the body of Jesus Christ. Bring us with all your saints to the heavenly banquet, remembering with love and thanksgiving the saints we have known. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

**MEAL**

*God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ*

**Prayer for our Offerings**

Over the past week, we have received offerings by mail, drop off, or online and so we give thanks for the many gifts we have received:

Almighty God, we worship today as a scattered church, yet we are one and we are blessed. Receive the gifts we bring in gratitude for your care for us, and help us to bless you with dedication of our lives, through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

 **Blessing of Children**

God, we pray your blessing on the children of all ages whom you have entrusted to our care.  Thank you for giving them to us to love and to teach your ways.  Be with them, guard and protect them in these difficult times.  Bless them in all their learnings, so they may grow closer to you, wherever they are this week: at home, with friends, resting, at play, with toys, screens, books, and crafts.  In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

**Words of Institution – you can share this meal with your family or friends to remember Jesus sacrifice for us.**

On his last night, as he shared a meal with his friends,

our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;

broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,

and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,

shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

**Lord’s Prayer**

*Though we are apart, we are made one in Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, and so we pray as one:*

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those

who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours,

now and forever. Amen.

**Invitation to Communion**

*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*

**Communion**

*Let us eat together: the body of Christ, bread of heaven; and the blood of Christ, cup of salvation.*

**Prayer after Communion**

Gracious God, in this meal you have gathered your scattered people, drawn us to your heart, and nourished us at your table with food and drink, the body and blood of Christ. Now give us courage to be your people in the world, and voice to proclaim your truth this day and always, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

**SENDING**

*God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

**Blessing**

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,

nor things present, nor things to come,

nor powers, nor height, nor depth,

nor anything else in all creation,

will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, ☩ Jesus, the Christ,

and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,

bless you and keep you in eternal love.

Amen.

**Peace**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

\* *Prayer of the Day adapted by Jennifer Hoover from a prayer by Christine Longhurst found at: https://re-worship. blogspot.com/2011/08/prayers-of-people-august-21-2011.html*