



The Lord Stood by Us and Gave Us Strength...

Worship Resources for Mennonite Heritage Sunday, October 28, 2001

The Lord stood by us and gave us strength, so that the message might be fully proclaimed.
--2 Timothy 4:17

Welcome/Introduction

Welcome to this service of worship! Today has been designated Mennonite Heritage Sunday by Mennonite Church USA, and in the broader church many Protestants are celebrating Reformation Sunday. Our theme is from 2 Timothy 4:17: "The Lord stood by us and gave us strength, so that the message might be fully proclaimed." This verse reminds us that one of the values of examining our past is to see how God has led us and provided for us, not just for our own benefit, but so that God's reign could be extended in the world. One of our new hymns, "What is this place?" (HWB #1), states, "dreams, signs, and wonders sent from the past are what we need." Sometimes we need to look back over the paths our church tradition has traveled, and recapture the dreams of our ancestors, and celebrate the signs and wonders that God has performed in our midst. Then, we can "remember and speak again what we have heard: God's free redeeming word."

Prelude/Postlude

Consider using an arrangement of "A mighty fortress is our God" and/or another hymn from the Reformation or Anabaptist traditions (see page 872 for heritage hymns from the Anabaptist tradition) may tie in nicely with Mennonite Heritage Sunday. Be sure and note in the bulletin how the chosen hymn relates to today's theme.

Hymns

Optional hymns for beginning the service or between the welcome and the call to worship (all hymn numbers are from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*):

1 What is this place?

6 Here in this place

Call to Worship (Psalm 65: 1-5, 8, 11)

Leader: Praise is due to you, O God! To you all flesh shall come.

People: When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.

Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts.

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house.

Leader: By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation.

People: You are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.

Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs.

Leader: You make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy!

People: You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness!

Hymn Suggestions

32 Our Father God, thy name we praise (this hymn text is from the *Ausbund*, an early Anabaptist hymnal still used by the Amish)

37 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

68 O come, loud anthems let us sing

71 Joyful, joyful, we adore thee

74 We would extol thee

76 Praise, I will praise you, Lord

Children's Story

The children's story picks up a theme from the opening psalm. It can follow the call to worship or be put elsewhere in the service. We suggest focusing on Psalm 65:11: "your wagon tracks overflow with richness." Tell about the famous wagon trails that crossed the western part of the United States during the pioneer days, and how some of the ruts are still visible. If someone from your congregation has visited one of these wagon trails, it would be great to have them reflect on their experience. There might even be someone who could bring in a model of a pioneer wagon or a

wheel from an old wagon. Share with the children what is special about wagon tracks that are old—they have survived years of erosion or development, they remind us of the past, they mark a path that was once taken. Then reflect on this verse from Psalm 65. God's "wagon tracks" is a way of speaking of how God's activity in our world is visible, especially when we look to the past. As you look back over the history of your local congregation (or the wider church), can you identify signs of God's presence, and give the children a couple of those examples? How, in your congregation's life, have God's "wagon tracks overflow[ed] with richness?"

Hymn (If a hymn is desired after the children's story, here are some options)

37 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

76 Praise, I will praise you, Lord

86 Now thank we all our God

328 O God, our help in ages past (verses 1-3, 6)

Prayer of Confession (Adapted to the tradition of the "Jesus" Prayer)

The Gospel text for Mennonite Heritage Sunday is a foundation text for the Jesus prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner." Consider using this along with the song "KyrieEleison," *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 144. Or you may want to write your own prayer using the following as a pattern.

Prayer

Leader: Lord God in heaven we confess that we try to measure our faithfulness

by comparing ourselves with others.

People: Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us as sinners.

Leader: Forgive us O God where we fail to see your Spirit's work in others,

in those who have lived before us.

People: Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us as sinners.

Leader: Forgive us for choosing comfort and convenience over faithfulness.

People: Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us as sinners.

Sing "Kyrie Eleison," several times reflectively

Words of Assurance (from Psalm 103:8, 11-12)

Leader: The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God's steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

Or read *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 694 in unison as words of assurance.

Hymns (appropriate to use with Joel 2:23-29, either after the scripture is read, or following the sermon)

37 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

59 Sing praise to God who reigns

90 For the fruit of all creation

290 Spirit, come, dispel our sadness

291 O Holy Spirit, by whose breath

328 O God, our help in ages past

486 God of our life

Hymns (appropriate to use with 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18, either after the scripture, or after the sermon)

86 Now thank we all our God

165 A mighty fortress is our God (a hymn by Martin Luther)

314 The word of God is solid ground (a hymn text from the *Ausbund*)

1. Come, come ye saints

438 I sing with exultation (a hymn text from the *Ausbund*)

546 Guide my feet

549 Savior of my soul

567 How firm a foundation

579 Lift every voice and sing (an African-American anthem)

609 Awake, my soul

636 For all the saints (traditionally used with All Saints Day observances November 1)

Scripture Reading\Sermon Texts: Joel 2:23-29, and 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Comments on the Texts\Sermon Ideas for the Preacher

It is important for a people to continue to dream dreams and to see visions. When you pass through trying times expect to hear a Word from God. God's Spirit will not abandon the faithful. It is important to keep the faith as our forebears did. Let us not lose confidence or hope even in difficult times. God is always trustworthy. God will always save, even though the Christian life is a constant struggle against evil influences. It is important to leave a worthy legacy for those who will follow us.

Joel 2:23-29—This passage begins with a call to worship God whose past and future saving deeds are recounted and predicted. Renewal characterizes the deeds cited here. V. 23 recounts God's past work of vindicating his people. While the context seems to refer to God's physical provisions for Israel, the Hebrew word for "early rain" can also be translated "teacher." Vv. 24-27 predict God's future works which answer past negative experiences (crop-destroying insect pests, v. 25, and being put to shame, vv. 26-27). A shift to God's future spiritual provisions is made in vv. 28-29, a promise which according to Peter was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:14-21. God's word in vv. 30-32 is that the progression of God's saving deeds is moving toward "the day of the Lord," a day of both judgment and salvation. Significant in the progression of events is the fact that God is the chief actor who comes to dwell among the redeemed people.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite story ought to be presented as a part of the larger story of God's progressive saving acts and, in particular, God's renewing work in the larger church. Like Joel's prophecies regarding ancient Israel, our Anabaptist-Mennonite story might be reviewed as a succession of God's renewing acts, each of which implies a negative experience or need. Illustrative stories can be cited. A question about where we Mennonites are on God's timetable might be raised. What are our current needs for renewal and how is God already at work bringing renewal?

2 Tim. 4:6-8—The Apostle Paul stands at a turning point. He views his past spiritual journey with some satisfaction and looks into the future with hope and confidence. As he views his future, he includes many others "all those who love his appearing." Are we Mennonite among these? What are the points of contact between our Mennonite story and each of Paul's statements here? In what way, if any, is the Mennonite story now at the point of being sacrificed and deserted, cf. v. 6? How do we evaluate our past Mennonite story? What are our criteria for evaluation? In what ways have we fought a good fight and kept the faith and in what ways have we not done so? cf. v. 7. To what extent do we have confidence for the Day of Judgment? cf. v. 8. Although Paul reviews the past, he looks forward to the future. As we review our past, what hope do we have as we look to the future? Someone once quoted this statement: "There go the Mennonites; they know where they've come from, but they don't know where they're going." Do we really know where we've come from? If so, do we know where we're headed? How can those of us who look back with gratitude, also look forward to and love Jesus appearing?

A good resource for developing the theme, "The Lord stood by us and gave us strength, so that the message might be fully proclaimed," is the book, *Coming Home: Stories Of Anabaptists in Britain and Ireland*, edited by Alan Kreider and Stuart Murray (Pandora Press, 2000). These stories tell how the example of Dirk Willems—who turned back to rescue his pursuer from drowning, was promptly arrested by the man he rescued, was tried and condemned to be burned to death—has

had a strong influence on the lives of Christians in Britain and Ireland. They are finding in Anabaptism, a tradition within which they feel at home. It is deeply moving to learn of these Christians from a wide variety of faith traditions who are finding in Anabaptism that which they claim to have been searching for most of their adult lives. The sermon could include several of these stories.

For convenience in locating some of the most relevant stories in *Coming Home*, here is a list of story tellers who refer to Dirk Willems, or to other Anabaptist martyrs or leaders: Bob Allay (p.23), Eoin de Baldrathe (p. 29), Roger Forster (p. 55), Ruth Gouldbourne (p. 61), Gilly Greenwood (p. 62), Chris Horton (p. 65), Duncan Johnstone (p. 68), Alastair McKay (p. 87), Bill Miller (p. 94), Ian Milligan (p. 97), and Graham Watkins (p. 127).

Pastoral Prayer (based on Joel 2:23-29)

We, the children of Zion, are glad. We rejoice in you, O Lord. You have poured out upon us blessings like abundant rain. Our threshing floors are full of grain; our barrels overflow with the wine of your goodness. We rest in your providence, your generosity, your loving kindness. We delight in your presence. Time and time again, you have shown us that you are present in our midst. Whether we have had little or much, whether we have suffered or prospered, you have been our faithful and sustaining God. When we . . . , you were there. (*Add specific ways God has been faithful in your congregation's experience.*) Since you have been faithful in times past, we can ask in confidence that you minister to our current needs . . . (*Name them as appropriate.*)

We, the children of Zion, are glad. We rejoice in you, O Lord. You have dealt wonderfully with us. You have redeemed us. You have led us by your hand. From the call to Abraham and Sarah, to the birth of the church at Pentecost, to the birth of the Free Church (Anabaptist) Movement, to the birth of our congregation in _____ (*year*), you have led us. You have provided leaders and faithful members, who by God's Spirit have nurtured us and cared for us. Thank you for . . . (*name as many as you wish*).

And now, we ask that you call out from among us new leaders on whom you will pour out your spirit. Anoint our sons and daughters to prophesy, to dream dreams and see visions. Give them courage to dream your dreams. Give them eyes to see your visions. Give us willing hearts to follow those dreams and visions. Mold and shape us by those dreams and visions to be faithful and passionate witnesses of your love, grace, and truth in the twenty-first century. May it be so, in the name of our Lord. Amen.

Sending

Adapt 2 Timothy 4: 7-8, 18b as the benediction, using the pronoun "you" instead of "I".

These worship resources were planned and gathered for the Historical Committee & Archives of Mennonite Church USA by Marilyn Voran, East Goshen Mennonite Church; Janeen Bertsche Johnson and Myron Schrag, Eighth Street Mennonite Church; Firman Gingerich, College Mennonite Church; Ron Kennel, Clinton Brick Mennonite Church; and John E. Sharp, Waterford Mennonite Church—all of Goshen, Indiana.