

Call to Worship

One: Come, people of God, out of our separateness;

All: Bind us together, Lord.

One: Come all who seek the presence of Christ;

All: Bind us together, Lord.

One: Come one and all, and let us bring our limitations and shortcomings,

All: Bind us together, Lord,

One: Let us bring our abilities and gifts;

All: Bind us together, Lord;

One: Both young and old, with friends and families, and be the body of Christ;

All: Bind us together, mind, body, and spirit;

ALL: Come, one and all in worshiping our God.

~ Brett Webb-Mitchell

Confession

Litany of Confession

One: O God, you have called each of us by name and have called us to be a covenant community.

All: We promise at the baptism of children to love, encourage, and support them, to share the good news of the gospel with them, and to help them to know and follow Christ.

One: We confess that we do not love, encourage, and support children when we allow barriers their wheelchairs cannot cross, when we lose patience with children who can't sit still, when we do not hear the beauty in voices that struggle to speak.

All: Forgive us, O God, for promises not kept.

One: We confess that we do not share the gospel when we do not seek ways to share the good news with children who learn in different ways or with children who need new ways to see or hear.

All: Forgive us, O God, for promises not kept.

One: We confess that we do not help children know and follow Christ as long as any are excluded from our worship, learning, and fellowship. We do not show your love when we ignore the needs of any child.

All: We confess, O God, that we have not kept the promises we have made. We are truly sorry. We come to you in the name of Jesus, asking forgiveness.

One: God has promised to forgive all who come with true repentance. Hear the good news. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

All: As a forgiven people, we will work in partnership with God and with each other to create an inclusive community, where all are welcome, where all can know the loving presence of God, freely given to us all. Then we will know that we are one in Christ. Thanks be to God!

~ Bebe Baldwin

Prayer of Confession

God of all people and places, we beseech you to be present in our worship of You this day. We confess that we lack the oneness with our sisters and brothers, especially those with disabilities, because of our inability to see beyond the labels and categories. We have closed our ears to the voices of those who have sought to be included as members of your body, especially those who are young of age and living with a disability; we have refused entry to those who are in wheelchairs or with walkers, making parts of our worship space and practice uninviting. We have made it uncomfortable for all family members, especially those with disabilities, to be present among us. We often lack the vision to see that all people are welcome to this House of Prayer, no matter what one can or cannot do. When our sensibilities are threatened, we have turned our back on those who cannot communicate quickly and effectively. Some of us cling to our category of being “disabled,” while others cleave to able-bodied ways, both of us foolishly claiming that others cannot share in your expanding love, tremendous happiness, and humbling grace.

Gracious God, forgive us we pray; cleanse and renew our minds, bodies, and spirits, that we may all have a refreshed spirit of charity, patience, and hope. Fill us with a vision and perception of Your incarnated body in this place, among the people here this day. Transformed by your Spirit, may we worthily partake in the body of Christ, and gratefully participate in the ongoing life of God, who is always doing a new thing. We pray this in the name of God, Creator, Christ, and Redeemer.

~ Brett Webb-Mitchell

Prayers

Opening Prayer

Tender God, whose strength is made perfect in our weaknesses and limitations, help us to believe that you accept us for who we are, just as we are. Holy Spirit, assist us, with all our wounds and sense of brokenness, to be ambassadors of your love, like earthen vessels that contain the living abundant waters of Christ, so that we may live with purpose and courage as one of Christ's disciples. Hear us, O God, with the small voices and gestures of children, the chorus of our various families, and the fierce movement of signing hands, as we gather in praying, in signing hymns, and praising You, our Creator. Amen

~ Brett Webb-Mitchell

A Prayer for Children and Families

One: Loving God, who was present with us in Jesus. the friend of children; we are thankful for the joy we know as we welcome children into our lives and into our church.

All: Help us to remember that we are all one in Christ.

One: We are thankful for the gifts children bring to our community: questions that challenge us, stories that engage us, and invitations that call us into playfulness.

All: Help us to remember that we are all one in Christ.

One: We are thankful for the example of Jesus who showed friendship with children and who invited them to come to him.

All: Help us to remember that we are all one in Christ.

One: We pray today for all children, remembering especially children who live with disabilities, both visible and invisible. We pray for children who communicate, move, and learn differently, for children who use wheelchairs, and for children who see and hear in a different way.

All: Help us to remember that we are all one in Christ.

One: Help us to recognize the barriers in our hearts and in our buildings, barriers that keep children from worshipping, learning, and serving together with us.

All: Help us to remember that we are all one in Christ.

One: Give us understanding and knowledge that we may find the will and the resources for breaking the barriers that exclude any children, that we may invite and welcome all into full participation in the church.

All: Help us to remember that we are all one in Christ.

One: We pray for all families whose time, energy, resources, and faith are challenged as they care for children. Help us, as a community, to surround all families with our love and support.

All: Help us to remember that we are all one in Christ.

One: Help us, O God, to welcome all children and families as you welcome them all into your love. Create in us a community that excludes no one, that welcomes all into our fellowship so that all may know the good news of the gospel.

All: Thank you for the joy we know because we are one, the Body of Christ, created in your image. We pray in the name of Jesus, the children's friend. Amen

~ Bebe Baldwin

Children's Moment

**See "A Lesson From My Kitchen Drawer," by Bruce Tjaden, included separately with these materials.

Suggested Music

From *Sing the Faith*

- Hymn #2221 "In Unity We Lift Our Song"
- Hymn #2196 "We Walk by Faith"
- Hymn #2155 "Blest are They"

From *The Presbyterian Hymnal*

- Hymn #358 "Help Us Accept Each Other"
- Hymn #386 "O for a World"
- Hymn #343 "Called as Partners in Christ's Service"

"That All May Enter" Hymn Sung to the tune of "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past"

"The church of Christ says Welcome, all
That all may enter here.
We come to worship and to serve
And we must persevere.

The steps of faith are steep to climb
For all who follow Him.
Let not our steps of brick and stone
Be stumbling blocks within.

The full community of God
We welcome through your grace.
We hinder not, nor turn away
From this our time and place.
Accessible, for all to come
To worship God above;
A family including all
In Christ's abundant love."

~ Gail Kenefake, 2004

“It’s You I Like”

Many people remember, with great tenderness, the song that the Rev. Fred Rogers, of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, sang to Jeff Erlanger who was seated in a wheelchair. That music is included separately in these materials. We are thankful that Family Communications granted us permission for this use.

Sermon Ideas and Tips

Prior to writing your sermon, consider gathering a few persons from your church community who have a disability or are a parent of a child with a disability to talk about what they experience, what scriptures are particularly helpful or hurtful, what life experiences might be used as sermon illustrations, etc. It is the old adage: “Nothing about us, without us.”

In worship planning, remember to include persons with disabilities as liturgists, ushers, communion servers, preachers – all the ways people who are able-bodied share their gifts with the church.

Some things to keep in mind when preparing your sermon:

- ✓ Use “people first language,” not the disabling condition (the child who is blind vs. the blind child).
- ✓ Scripture is rich with stories that can be used for developing sermons. Most of the accounts we have of Jesus interacting with individuals were with people who had some kind of disability, were marginalized, or considered outcasts.
- ✓ Emphasize that persons with disabilities are made in the Image of God and that we all make up the Body of Christ – with value, dignity and gifts.
- ✓ Scripture does **not** teach that having a disability is the result of sin or a lack of faith. A cure is not withheld because a person did not pray hard enough. Healing comes in different ways and there is a difference between the concepts of “healing” and “cure.”
- ✓ Promote mutuality of ministry. Persons with disabilities can minister to others. They are not looking to be the objects of charity or to be “fixed.”
- ✓ Persons with disabilities are not super-human, more spiritual, or more gifted by God because they live with a disability.
- ✓ Disability is not the will of God.
- ✓ We are all interdependent, wounded and broken.
- ✓ Preaching should never contribute to a person’s isolation or exclusion. Demonstrate pastoral care in the midst of preaching.
- ✓ Use special care when preaching the gospel healing stories. A wonderful resource is *A Healing Homiletic* by Kathy Black.
- ✓ Avoid using terms like “blindness,” “deafness,” etc. as spiritual metaphors (we are blind to our transgressions; deaf to hearing the word of God).
- ✓ Use persons who have disabilities as positive models.

Benediction/Blessing and Charge

The Word of God has become flesh, and lived among us. Old and young, families of all shapes and sizes, with some members with disabilities and others able-bodied: Rejoice! We are *all* joint heirs with God in Christ, and the Spirit has created and called us to be members of the body of Christ. As the body of Christ, let us leave this place with the song of Christ in our hearts, sharing with all who we meet the good news of God's amazing love. Amen

~ Brett Webb-Mitchell