

A Mission and Service Fund Worship Service

(Worship Service and Sermon Prepared by Very Rev. Dr. Marion Parady, April 2008 for Newfoundland/Labrador Conference. Shared with all conferences with permission)

Living Water

Planning

Pre-order: Mission and Service Fund Free Materials, including the Special Edition of Mandate which highlights where our money to the Mission and Service Fund goes (one for each person) and Mission and Service Fund envelopes for visitors and those wishing to make a special donation – note that there are “In Celebration” envelopes and “In Memoriam” envelopes; order also the children’s M&S material for use in the Sunday School or for the Children’s Time during worship, if you have one – use an M&S story which includes children; have Mission and Service Fund envelopes, plus “In Celebration” and “In Memoriam” envelopes available every Sunday, as some visitors choose to give to the church in this way;

Adapt or revise parts of this worship service to suit your own format for worship, including the hymns (choose hymns you know or can learn); insert introits, anthems and other choir music, where appropriate.

Involve more than one person in the leadership of worship. Select scripture readers including 3 for the second reading. Practice with them so that all involved can lead with a sense of confidence and commitment.

Prepare the Bulletin. Include this note:

Thank you for your money for the Mission and Service Fund. If you presently do not give, prayerfully consider including the Mission and Service Fund in your giving. If you do give and can afford to give more, please increase your giving.

Your gifts, combined with those of others, enable the United Church to:

Assist approximately 159 small Canadian Congregations;

Provide grants to nearly 86 organizations working with and for the poor in Canada;

Provide grants of \$4.9 million annually to overseas partners;

Join with 35 ecumenical partners in seeking social and economic justice in Canada and overseas.

Included at the end of this resource are the Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession and the sermon by Very Rev. Dr. Marion Parady. It is intended for use on Mission and Service Fund Sunday but please feel free to revise and adapt to suit your specific situation and for any Sunday.

Pray for God’s blessings on those who lead, those who attend and on all in need in the world God loves.

Worship Service Living Water

GOD CALLS US

To Gather as Community for Worship

Organ Prelude:

Call to Worship:

Leader: Let us worship God, the Wellspring of Life,
who comes to us through the Holy Spirit and is
known to us through Jesus, the Christ.

All: **This is the day God has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Leader: God is Spirit and those who worship must worship in Spirit and in Truth.

All: **We worship God and seek to follow Jesus as “Living Water”.**

Prayer of Approach: (Unison)

**Holy God, Source of all life and love,
we give you thanks and praise that we are not alone
because we live in the world you have made.
We thank and praise you that we can show our love for you
through acts of caring for others as members of one family.
In the Spirit of Christ, open our hearts to the awareness
that beneath our daily thirsts lie a deeper thirst still,
for the “living water” that you alone can give.
To you, the one God, Creator, Christ, and Spirit,
we offer all praise and thanksgiving now and forever. Amen.**

Hymn: Voice United (VU) #219, When All Your Mercies, O My God

Prayer of Confession: (Unison)

**Spirit God, who knows us better than we know ourselves,
we present ourselves frequently as calm and in control.
Yet, you know the hunger and thirst that lie within us.
To you we name in silence the places where we hurt
and where we have ignored or hurt others.
We name the fear we have about tomorrow
for ourselves, for those we love and for our world.
We own before you our failure to reach out with respect
to our sisters and brothers in a world in deep need**

of water, food, clothing and shelter. (Time for silence)

Sung Response, verse 3 of VU#681 “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life”

Assurance of Pardon:

Leader: The good news of the gospel: God comes to us through the Spirit of Christ as “Living Water”; quenching our deep thirst, refreshing our weariness, cleansing our wounds of life. God comes to us as a “fountain of life” and for all the world a river of hope, springing up in the midst of the deserts of despair and failure. Be assured of God’s forgiveness. Let us offer to God honour and blessings, glory and praise, now and forever. (From VU #645).

To Listen for God’s Word

Prayer for Illumination: (Unison)

Gracious God, whose ways are not our ways, we seek your truth.

We thirst for living water for our spirits

and for living water for a world desperate for the basic survival needs of life: water, food, shelter, clothing and medicine.

Through music, scripture and sermon, open our minds and hearts to learn and to follow, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 21: 14 – 21

Introduction to the reading: Throughout the pages of the Bible, we read over and over again that God hears the cries of people in distress and responds. We pick up the story of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael after Sarah demands that Abraham cast Hagar and Ishmael out in the wilderness. God hears the cry of Hagar and Ishmael for water to drink and supplies their need.

Responsive Reading: Psalm 42, 43, VU #768

Scripture Reading: John 4: 7-26

(Read by three Readers: Narrator; Jesus; Woman at the Well)

Hymn: VU #630, O Christ, In Thee My Soul

Sermon: Living Water

To Respond with Generous Giving and Loving Living

Offering our Gifts:

Introduction to Offering:

We want our Church to be a continued sign of God’s presence in this community (*name of church or pastoral charge*) and so we give our money for its upkeep and for salaries. We care when people in God’s world lack clean water to drink, food to eat, a safe place

to live, and basic medical care and so we give to the Mission and Service Fund. You and I can't go everywhere but our money can. For the benefit of visitors and those who wish to make an additional donation to the Mission and Service Fund, there is an envelope provided with your bulletin. Together we can and do make a difference. God gives and God's goodness is known; we give and God's goodness is shown. Our offering will now be received.

Offertory hymn: VU #541

Prayer of Dedication:

Global God and God of this sacred place and community,
we give with joy in thanksgiving for all of your goodness.
Bless our gifts that together they will do far more than we can do alone.
Use our gifts to proclaim the good news within this church community and,
through the Mission and Service Fund, throughout a needy world.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Life and Work of the Church (Announcements)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Tune: Rhuddlan, VU #686 Voices United or Cwm Rhondda or any 878787 tune
Hear the stories of the faithful,
Those who serve both far and near;
Speak about the ways God leads us,
Share a vision bold and clear.
Dare to be the church in God's world,
Dare to be the church right here.

We have missions in our downtowns,
Offer shelter, lend a hand;
We provide a caring presence
Coast to coast across our land.
Dare to be the church in God's world,
Dare to be the church right here.

We're committed to the work of
Justice-seeking ministries;
We support those outreach programs
That address life's greatest fears.
Dare to be the church in God's world.
Dare to be the church right here.

Partner churches share
Christ's mission –

Teaching, healing, meeting needs;
In the wake of drought and famine,
We are there in prayer and deeds.
Dare to be the church in God's world,
Dare to be the church right here.

Doctors, nurses, farmers, teachers,
Guided by Christ's caring way;
Chaplains who work with our students
Sharing faith and hope each day.
Dare to be the church in God's world,
Dare to be the church right here.

Hear the ways that Christ inspires us
Through the lessons that we share;
Speak a word of grace and comfort,
Offer gifts that show you care.
Dare to be the church in God's world,
Dare to be the church right here.

((From: Minutes for Mission 2007, words by Bill Steadman)

Commissioning and Benediction:

Leader: Go into the world with a daring and tender love.

As we go forth, let us give thanks and glory to God.

All: Glory to God,

whose power, working in us,

can do infinitely more

than we can ask or imagine.

Glory to God from generation to generation,

in the church, and in Christ Jesus,

forever and ever. Amen. (Celebrate God's Presence, page 74)

Benediction:

May the love of God surround you;

the grace of Christ attend you;

and the Holy Spirit keep you now and forever. Amen.

Organ Postlude

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

(Context of Prayer. This is an adaptation of a prayer on water written by the Very Rev. Dr. Marion Parry shortly after her visit to Angola, Africa in March 2004. In Angola, thousands die because of unclean, drinking water. In Angola, church partners sacrificially ensured that Marion and other Canadian visitors were treated to properly-prepared food, heated water for washing, and safe water for drinking. The prayer is intended as a prayerful meditation.)

Leader:

Welcoming God,

We are thankful for those who generously give clean water,
good food, safe accommodation and genuine friendship.

These acts remind us of who we are as hospitable people and whose we are
as your children who have received much from your bountiful blessings.

We know that it is so easy for us to give a cup of cold water.

We turn the tap and plop the ice
or unscrew a bottle cap and clean, clear water is abundantly ours to consume.

We are mindful that in Jesus' day, in Angola today, and in many countries of our world,
giving a cup of cold water was and is sacrificial giving.

Women and children carry water, frequently unclean, on their heads for miles—
precious water where every drop is needed for drinking, cooking, and washing.

Bottled water is purchased sacrificially and given to visitors
who fear the disease of local water and need it to quench their thirst
and to brush their teeth.

Welcoming God, thank you for those who give, without question,
a cup of cold water to needy strangers.

Recognizing our own parched spirits and out of love for those
who are so generous in the midst of scarcity
and those who have parched throats,
may we extend our welcome to embrace all members
of our global family in the spirit of Christ. Amen.

(Continue in prayer)

We pray for the Church, for (*name pastoral charge*), The United Church of Canada,
the Canadian and World Council of Churches and people of all other faith communities
who seek to walk your way of compassion, justice and peace.

We remember our Moderator, General Council, and Conference staff,
members of congregations and ministers serving congregations and outreach ministries.
O God, may all of us who profess the Christian faith live up to our higher calling
in Jesus, the Christ.

Loving God, now in the silence of our hearts
we pray for those, known and unknown to us who need our prayers the most:
those sick at home and in hospital; those in seniors' homes; those faced with
heavy decisions; those who are lonely and afraid; those we seek to serve through
the Mission and Service Fund.

And we pray for ourselves that you will fulfill the good desires of our minds and hearts
for the "living water" of love, compassion, inner peace, dignity and wholeness.

Now, as children turn to a mother who watches over them,
we turn to you, O God, saying together:

The Lord's Prayer

Sermon: Living Water

Introduction:

If you are middle-age or older you, no doubt, are familiar with wells. Many of us have childhood memories of fetching water from a well in a bucket and then carrying it carefully home to have water to drink and to cook dinner. Even today some people go to their favourite flowing spring to fetch water which they claim tastes much better than tap water. When there is a "boil order" in a community, we become aware that clean, safe water is, indeed, precious. It is difficult to believe that in some of our communities, "boil orders" have been in effect for years. It is also difficult to believe that in our world of abundance, millions of people suffer from lack of safe, clean water.

Journey with me to a country in Africa. Picture a water hole about 6 feet by 6 feet square. The water hole is ringed with mud. There are dozens of animals wading in that water or standing on the edge, trying to cool off in the hot sun and quenching their thirst by lapping up the water. People, too, gather to fetch that water, having walked great distances, in some situations. The water isn't fit to drink but it is all they have. As a result diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea are rampant in the village.

Put that picture to one side and now see that same village with a large concrete cistern in the centre. There is a small plant nearby that changes the water from the sea into clean, safe drinking water. Some of the money we give to the Mission and Service Fund provides funds and people so that many villages in our world can have water fit to drink, water to help children live instead of dying before the age of 5 years—Living Water!

The Gospel Story of Living Water:

We leave Africa and turn to our gospel reading for today. Picture Jesus saying to the woman at the well, "Give me a drink." We recall a similar statement at an agonizing time of excruciating pain when from the Cross, Jesus says, "I am thirsty."

Mahatma Ghandi once said: "To a hungry person, God comes in a loaf of bread."
To a thirsty person, God comes in a cup of cold water fit to drink. As the gospel writer, John, tells the story, Jesus is on his way north from Jerusalem to Galilee. He takes the

most direct route through Samaria. From the Bible we know that there is deep hatred and conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a race of people who were sort of step-brothers and step-sisters of the Jews, descendent of the northern tribes of Israel. They were considered “unclean” because of inter-marriage with other races of people. They were in conflict with the Jews also because of deep differences of opinion in years gone by about the Temple and the proper place to worship.

No wonder, then, when Jesus sits down to rest from his journey at the well in the hottest period of the day and then speaks to the woman of Samaria who comes to fetch water, she is astonished for two reasons. First, in Jesus’ day, a devout man would never enter into conversation with a woman in public and secondly, a Jew, who considered a Samaritan “unclean”, would never ask anything from a Samaritan, especially not a drink when he does not even have his own cup. It is hard for us to imagine how radical an act this was on the part of Jesus.

“Give me a drink,” Jesus, in his thirst, says to the woman. And the surprised Samaritan woman rightfully queries: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”

Thirst knows no boundaries and, although the story doesn’t say so, no doubt the woman does the hospitable act and gives Jesus a drink of cold water from the well. Like most of the stories in the gospel of John, the conversation is not a straightforward “give me a drink” and “here is your drink” type of story. The conversation is loaded with double and triple meanings. Jesus says “water” and the woman says “water” but after his thirst is quenched Jesus speaks about another kind of water.

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘give me a drink’, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water”. What a curious thing to say to someone who has a meal to prepare and just came to Jacob’s Well to fetch a pail of water in order to get on with the job.

The gospel writer, John, is writing some 60 to 70 years after Jesus’ death and, through telling the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, wants his readers to view Jesus, the Christ, as “Living Water.” Living Water? “Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Our ancestor, Jacob, gave us this well. You don’t claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?” (According to the legend, Jacob had drawn water from the well without having to draw the water; the “living” or bubbling water just rose to the surface for him to drink.)

By the time of John’s gospel, Christianity had spread out into the wider world with the claim that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, there was a fresh outpouring of God’s spirit into people’s lives. Thus, the conversation attempts to resolve another conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans: to the Jewish people, Jerusalem was the ultimate place for worship; to the Samaritans, it was Mount Gerizim—the scene where God intervened in the sacrifice of Isaac. The conversation, therefore, leads very quickly

to an attempted argument. Where is the “holy of holies?” Where is the place where we might obtain this living water and really make contact with God?

So the woman at the well says: “Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” And to paraphrase, Jesus replies: “Believe me, the time will come when we will worship God in neither place...God is Spirit and those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth.” In other words, “Living Water” means the Spirit of God invading our lives and our worship.

As you heard the story read, there are many other conversations and meanings in the story. Our purpose today is to lift up the two meanings of Living Water. Living Water is the hunger and thirst of millions of people in our world for ordinary, every day bread and water. Living Water is our inner yearning and the yearning of so many people, crying out for the bread and water of life - another kind of “Living Water”. It is the kind of “living water” that has the poet Psalmist crying out:

“As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

The two kinds of “Living Water” are closer in meaning than we may think. “I thirst” is the cry from the lips of Jesus, from the lips of Hagar and Ishmael, and from the lips of people around our world, some in our own province. To quench someone’s thirst is to give “living water”.

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” is the cry from the Psalmist of long ago and it is our cry. The need is for “living water”.

Living Water Through the Mission and Service Fund

The Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada is our primary way of being “living water” for many in God’s world. For example, in Zambia, as in many countries, there are many rural communities that do not have their own well. This means that people frequently have to walk quite a distance to get water and then must carry this heavy load back home again. In one farming community in Zambia, The People’s Action Forum, with money from our Mission and Service Fund, developed a water project. The money supplied for the water project covered the cost of the well and also provided funds to begin construction of a community school. In Zambia even basic education for children comes at a cost and many parents cannot afford to send their children to government schools. The building of a community schools means that all children can get an education.

When we give to the Mission and Service Fund, we support the work of partners like the People’s Action Forum and we become, with them and the people of the community, part of the “living water” of life.

“Living Water” means water fit to drink.

“Living Water” means that girls and boys can go to school.

“Living Water” means emergency food and clothing through Food Banks in our own country and when there is an earthquake or similar crisis in other countries.

“Living Water” means supplying seeds so that people might grow their own crops. When we hear the cries and respond by giving to the Mission and Service Fund, we offer “living water” and we find that our souls are truly satisfied with the “Living Water” of life – the outpouring of God’s Spirit into our lives and our worship as we love God and follow the teachings of Jesus.

This worship service is brought to you by the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada with thanks to the Very Rev. Dr. Marion Pardy and the Conference of Newfoundland and Labrador.



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