

Unsettled but Unafraid: A Liturgy for Worshipping at Home

Week of July 19, 2020

St. Simons Presbyterian Church

Although we are not able to gather in-person for worship, we are able to gather in spirit. This liturgy is designed to be used alongside the worship video, although it can be used on its own. Use it individually or as a family. If you are using it in a family setting, consider giving each person one part to lead. If using individually, try to carve out 10-minutes to quietly read, reflect, and pray through. No matter how you worship, God will show up. Liturgy this week was compiled by Rev. Alan Dyer with a reflection written by Rhonda Hambright, Director of Music Ministry.



Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

Search me, God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Prayer of Confession¹ *(included in video)*

As members of Christ's body, we confess the reality of sin and brokenness in personal and common life. Trusting in God's abundant grace, we approach God with confidence confessing together the sinful state of the world and our lives. Although today we may pray this prayer alone or only with our families, we pray this prayer together with our church in Spirit.

Creator God, we confess before You that we do not follow the ways of the world You created, but instead follow the ways of the world we have created. We treat our own needs and desires as if they are more important than anyone else's. We put worldly success, fame and satisfaction above the needs of others, especially the people we do not see. Forgive us. Call us back to You, to love others and to love You, to be good stewards of all You have given us and to participate more fully in Your reign. Help us to turn away from the temptations of the world we have created, and to turn back to You. In the name of Jesus, who leads us into life, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Where can we go from the Spirit? Where can we hide from God's presence? There is no place we can go where we will be forgotten by God. There is no place we can fall into that God cannot find us. God restores us, and sets our feet back on right paths. We are forgiven, loved, and restored. Go and share the Good News, that God loves you madly. Amen.

Scripture - Genesis 28:10-19a *(included in video)*

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

¹ This week's confession is adapted from liturgy created by Rev. Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, rev-o-lution.org.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Questions for Reflection

1. The story of Jacob’s Ladder is one that can be described as a “thin place” — a place where the distance between heaven and earth seems to disappear. Do you have a thin place in your life? What does that place reveal to you about who God is?
2. What were the circumstances that brought about your deepest spiritual experience?
3. At the end of today’s scripture, Jacob marks the spot of his dream by placing a stone. What do you think the significance of that action is? Have you ever marked a significant moment or place in your life with an object?

Prayers of the People and Lord’s Prayer

Gracious Creator, Sower of life,
you know the complicated histories
that have carried us to this moment.

You know the names of all our generations,
for you are there in each story of falling away
and turning home,
in our long years of wandering, and in the shining moments
when we recognize your presence and find the grace to worship you.
You are no stranger to the striving
or the listlessness of humanity.

Incarnate One, all of creation is groaning,
and so we dare to ask that you would come to us;
be born again in this place. In the midst of our boredom,
our self-congratulation, our closeted vision,
startle us with the tearing, the cry, the first breath of life
that will not be restrained.

Strengthen in us the fruits of your Spirit, and teach us to pray:
We pray for all who flee from pasts by which they are haunted.
We lift up all who feel abandoned by a future for which they had hoped.
We plead for all who do not know that they are loved and chosen.
We intercede for our own divided souls.

Help us to trust that you are at work in every mingled heart,

every conflicted community.

Nourish the life you plant within us,
that we might keep seeding the world with your truth and your grace;
in the name of Jesus, who gave his life out of love for the world.

We pray these things trusting in your love as we say together the prayer Jesus taught us:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever.
Amen.**

A Prayer for the Week:

O God of Jacob,
you speak in the light of day
and in the dark of night
when our sleeping is filled with dreams of heaven and earth.
May Jacob's vision
remind us to be open and watchful,
ready to discover your presence in our midst.
Amen.

Sanctuary - Lord Prepare Me

A Reflection by Rhonda Hambright, Director of Music Ministry

I think that my earliest memory of attending church was at Ousley United Methodist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. At the time, the sanctuary seemed newly built. There were multi-colored squares of stained glass scattered throughout the 60's style building which had a balcony that I think led to the carillon tower. I was, of course, fascinated by the music of the organ and grand piano and the energetic director of the choir. That Sunday was communion. I probably had fallen asleep on the pew because I was so young at the time. My parents had left me and walked up to the altar rail for communion. I suddenly woke up before they got back and was very frightened. For many nights after that, I had dreams of going up endless stairs with stained-glass squares that never got to the carillon. The feeling of being lost with no one to guide me had turned into a nightmare. We had probably learned the children's song, "Jacob's Ladder," at

Vacation Bible School and I put the two things together. As I read the scripture about Jacob's Ladder for this Sunday, I was reminded of that recurring dream. Of course, I eventually got over my fear by the time kindergarten rolled around and felt that the church was my other home.

There's something about any sanctuary that is very special. When it is empty, there is a silence and a reverence that you experience during prayer. When it is full, the joy is unmistakable. There is a sense of anticipation and a presence of Holy Spirit that envelopes us all. Since we've been renovating and sheltering in place, I know that many of you have been working on your own spaces at home. I suppose some of us feel a need to create spaces that we can feel relaxed, spiritual, or away from the chaos of the world. There's nothing like an uncluttered, clean space or a beautifully crafted garden. I have a hard time keeping papers and stacks off of horizontal surfaces at home and work. When I'm really sick of it, I'll clean out and tidy things. Such a good feeling ensues! Creating these peaceful spaces is important. Your mind needs a place to connect with God. Maybe it isn't always the sanctuary. We've been worshiping in all sorts of ways and places for the past few months. In Matthew 18:20 Jesus says – For where two or three gather together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. Sounds like a plan for a pandemic with just two or three people at a time!

For some years now, our church has been planning a renovation. It's hard to believe that we are on the verge of finishing what we started. I am constantly amazed by the strong faith that is within our members. Even though we may not be able to worship together for a while, we are still building for the future. A church that understands that it will live on through many changes through the years is a growing, thriving place. When we do get back together, all of these places of worship that we have held in our hearts and our homes will combine to create powerful praise. I'm so looking forward to that day! In the meantime, try and keep the positive thoughts foremost in your mind. It will come, and we will be ready. Keep your lamps trimmed and burning!