

Worship Service #1

Preacher: Rev. Larissa Kwong-Abazia, Monmouth Presbytery, Vice-Moderator of the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Interim Pastor, Hillsborough Presbyterian Church

Welcome to this worship service which is offered to your congregation as a gift from the Presbytery of Southern New England. These worship services are designed to be flexible enough to allow your congregation to fit them in where needed, to allow for your pastor or worship leader to be able to take a break, and to continue online worship during this time of Covid-19. Our preachers for these worship services come to us from around the larger church and our focus for these services is to continue our learnings on anti-racism and equity as this is a ministry focus of the Presbytery. Today our worship leader is the Rev. Larissa Kwong-Abazia who is a member of Monmouth Presbytery in New Jersey. She currently serves in interim ministry and congregational consulting. Larissa served the larger church as the Vice-Moderator of the 221st General Assembly and is on the General Assembly Committee on Representation. Welcome Larissa and come let us worship God!

Call to Worship:

Leader: Though we have known hardship and pain, though life has not always turned out as we had hoped, we will stand here and say:

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

Leader: Though life becomes more complex, the deepest questions remain unanswered, and the mystery of faith deepens, we will say:

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

Leader: And though the pain of the world often seems more than we can bear or address, we will stand firm in our faith and say:

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

Music: When we Face an Uncertain Future (word adaptation)

When we face an unknown future that we can't imagine yet,
when the closeness we have treasured turns from blessing into threat —
As we miss our friends and loved ones, as we crave community,
may we look, God, in this season, for a whole new way to be.

Jesus faced the lonely desert as a time to look within.
There he met such trial and conflict; there he knew you were with him.
In this time of separation when we miss the life we've known,
may we hear your voice proclaiming: "I am here! You're not alone."

May we cherish those around us as we never have before.
May we think much less of profit; may we learn what matters more.

May we hear our neighbors' suffering; may we see our neighbors' pain.
May we learn new ways of offering life and health and hope again.

God, when illness comes to threaten, and when so much here goes wrong,
may we know this thing for certain — that your love is sure and strong.
You're beside us in our suffering — and when times are surely tough,
we may face an unknown future, but it's filled, Lord, with your love.

Tune: The Sacred Harp, 1844; attributed to Benjamin Franklin White ("God Whose Giving Knows No Ending")
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Email: carolynshymns@gmail.com New Hymns: www.carolynshymns.com/

This is a new hymn for singing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Churches have permission to use this hymn for free, including in streaming worship services.

We Confess our Faith/Belhar:

Our prayer of confession is a portion of the Confession of Belhar which is the newest confession to be added to our Book of Confessions. The Confession of Belhar is a confession from the church of the Global South, originating in the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa. This was the church formed after apartheid. Apartheid formed a racially stratified society. Those with the lightest skin tones were offered the greatest protection and opportunity. Racial separation was established by law and enforced through violence. Non-white citizens lived with constant and intrusive police presence and interference in the daily functions of life. Those who protested risked punishment, imprisonment, and even death. The roots of apartheid go back in South African culture and church for several centuries. The Dutch Reformed Church embodied racial separation when it formed three “mission” churches in the late nineteenth century, each categorized by its racial identity. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church was formed for people designated as “coloured” (biracial). The church’s complicity with racial separation kept Christians from worshipping and coming to the Lord’s Table together. The white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) created an elaborate biblical interpretation and ideology that supported racial separation and then the formal apartheid policies. The Dutch Reformed Church’s active participation and theological defense of apartheid moved the global church to name apartheid a status confessionis—a conviction that the Gospel was at stake and thus the faith needed to be proclaimed. Leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church wrestled with this situation theologically and practically. One outcome of their struggles was the emergence of the Confession of Belhar in the early 1980s. The Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), the church that succeeded the Dutch Reformed Mission Church after apartheid, has offered the Confession of Belhar to the global Reformed family as a gift, believing that the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice issue a call from God to the whole church toward holy action, transformation, and life.

Let us offer these words as a Confession to God:

We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another; that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain; that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted. Therefore, we reject and confess our complicity in any doctrine which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation; which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation. Have mercy us on O God.

Assurance of Pardon:

God's love and mercy knows no bounds. Whoever we are, wherever we have been, whatever we have done, know this, you are loved. You are made new in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit we find our true communion and are whole. Go in peace, knowing you are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Music: God Be in My Head (Westminster)

Scripture Reading: Exodus 2: 11-24

Sermon:

Offering/Offering Music: Esto es Digo (Westminster)

For the offering today, you are invited to give through your normal channels of giving to your local congregation. If you wish, you may also give to the Presbytery, to support our anti-racism and reparation work at www.psne.org/donate

Sending/Benediction:

Closing Music: Let us Build a House Words: Glory to God 301

1 Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive;
built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

2 Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

3 Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground,
where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space,
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

4 Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

5 Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: