

in the big love living liturgies

“Where is God Enshrined?” • Acts 17: 24-29

Worship Service for In-Home or Remote Group Use

prepared by Rev. Kathryn M. Schreiber

Worship Note

As we continue the selfless practice of Sheltering in Place, as we adapt and welcome new ways of being communities of faith, our souls need special care. This service is one of a series designed to align us with the Living God during these pandemic-impacted times.

Preparations

- You may wish to arrange to worship distantly with others at the same time.
- Read through this service beforehand to assemble items needed.
- A “Christ Candle” can be any sort of candle or object which represents Christ’s presence.
- Choose songs to sing (our suggestions or your favorites). Assemble what you’ll need to sing.
- Ensure an uninterrupted place to worship.
- Decorate your space to welcome God’s presence, as we do at church.

Time for Children

“Out of the Bag: Where’s God?” on YouTube channel: Kathryn Schreiber

Worship Service

Please adapt to make this worship service your own. Your intention is what is important.

We Gather

Invocation

Praise God - Maker of this world and all things in it!
 Praise God - Sovereign of heaven and earth!
 Praise God - Above the intentions of human action!
 Praise God - Life-Breather animating all creatures!
 Praise God - Author of the human race!
 Praise God - Ever-Present and constantly sought!
 Praise God - Source and Force of our being!
 Hallelujah! Amen!

Light the Christ Candle

Song for Welcoming God

*Suggestions: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You” - H van Dyke, HYMN TO JOY (#2 Chalice, #22 HOL)
 OR “All Creatures of Our God and King” - F A, LASST UNS ERFRUEN (#22 Chalice, #20 HOL)*

We Unburden and Gather Hope

Naming Our New Reality

If you are with others in person or via devices please share what is on your minds and in your hearts. If you are alone, speak out loud to God. It has been a long time since we gathered in our church buildings to worship God and enjoy each other’s fellowship. How have you adapted? How is that for you and your household? What have you come to treasure? What do you miss the most? Be honest. Name your truth no matter what it is. God is listening.

Silent Prayer

In the quietude of your soul simply be in God's presence just as you are. Your mind will wander. Thoughts will come up. Be kind to yourself. Temporarily let go of following your thoughts. Sit in God's presence, possibly repeating "Lord of Heaven and Earth" or "Source of Our Being."

Acts of Unburdening and Affirming

Place pebbles or small items at the base of the Christ Candle thinking or speaking whatever you wish to offer to God for release or gratitude. These offerings need not be named. The soul knows what to give to God and God knows what to receive.

Blessing of Grace

While we may feel far away from God
especially as we keep physical distance
intentionally separating from holy places and beloved friends
God is not far from us: God is here!

When we don't perceive God's presence
let us lean into the assurance of others
who speak of a very good God
in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

The Living God is not a physical deity that can be stolen or tarnished.
The Living God is not a product of our creative imaginations.
The Living God, though often mysterious, is eternally present. Amen.

We Listen

Scripture Reading: Acts 17: 24-29 (*New Revised Standard Version*)

The God who made the world and everything in it,
God who is Lord of heaven and earth,
does not live in shrines made by human hands,
nor is God served by human hands, as though God needed anything,
since God gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.

From one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth,
and God allotted the times of their existence
and the boundaries of the places where they would live,
so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for God and find God—
though indeed God is not far from each one of us.
For "In God we live and move and have our being";
as even some of your own poets have said,
"For we too are God's offspring."

Since we are God's offspring,
we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone,
an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.

May God add a blessing to the reading and reflecting upon this Holy Word. Amen.

Reflection Upon "Where is God Enshrined?"

(If your pastor has prepared a sermon, please read/view it now.)

Today we are going to reflect on places and practices when we've felt close to God. This may be done privately or shared in discussion with others.

Call to mind your home church - the beloved sanctuary which is currently closed to public worship. Imagine arriving, gathering, worshipping, fellowship, maybe attending a class, service project, or meeting. Let memories rise paying most attention to especially rewarding or enriching experiences. On the church property, when were you most uplifted, comforted, helpfully challenged?

Call to mind a different sacred place. This may not be a religious building, but it might be. Scan your memories for a special event or experience in a holy place where you felt a deep sense of well-being or significantly connected to something larger than yourself. Where were you? What were you doing? What remains special, possibly even holy, about that experience?

Call to mind your current household practices, especially related to self-care, prayer, devotion, or worship. Are there times when you feel especially supported or uplifted? Which practices best help you feel connected to God as the Creator, or to Jesus Christ, or to the Holy Spirit? (This may be a subtle experience. Signs of holy connection can be a comforting or enlarging of the spirit, the grace of an unearned sense of peace or wisdom, or a maturing of deep gratitude and patience.)

In the earliest days of Christianity, long before any Christian church was built, followers of Jesus felt very close to God. Through the direct experience of the person of Jesus from Nazareth, through the testimonies of his disciples, and through small gatherings in private homes the early Christians found God in their midst. They knew a Living God who was everywhere, not enshrined in a specific temple or altar.

St Paul, the great evangelist, traveled throughout the Roman Empire proclaiming this “always-with-us-wherever-we-are” God. He was preaching to Roman and Jewish people with deeply established religious ties and practices. Today’s scripture passage is set in the great city of Athens, a magnificent place filled with some of the most spectacular sacred architecture and sculpture in the Western world. There, St Paul spoke of God as a single deity available to everyone, everywhere. A God who did not need a fancy temple or huge statue to be worshipped well. A God who belonged and cared about all living beings, all human peoples. This was radical!

Over the past two centuries Christianity has become a global enterprise. We’ve filled the world with amazing works of Christian art and architecture, not to mention music, poetry, and literature. In parts of the world today there are far more “temples” built in the name of Jesus than all the Roman gods put together. And, we love our humble church properties, our sanctuaries and well-used social halls. We miss being there, doing things as we had in the past.

Recently, Dr. David Vásquez-Levy, President of Pacific School of Religion, described a current COVID-19 cartoon. It featured the Devil talking to God. The Devil said to God, “Ha-ha! I closed down all your churches!” To which God replied, “Ha-ha! I opened one in every household!” One of our national UCC leaders, Rev. Traci Blackmon, when Shelter-In-Place began said: “God has left the building and gone into the streets!”

Think about that. Where is God enshrined today? Where is God being encountered today? What might that mean for our local church ministries tomorrow? May these questions stimulate your thoughts and prayers this week.

Special Music

“You Do Not Walk Alone”

Lyrics: Traditional Irish Blessing Music: Elaine Hagenberg

Performed by the Charlotte Community Virtual Choir, Lance Burnette, piano, conducted by David Tang, Andrew and Irene’s nephew. Permission granted.

video: <https://youtu.be/bi5cQTrcFVc>

We Pray

Prayers of Petition

Spring is here - all creation is praising God! However, this is a very different spring for humanity during this frightening pandemic. This earth-wide event is too much to comprehend. We are striving to balance what is weighty and what uplifts - including the current and coming changes to how we are Christ's Church. Let us pray for all human religions. May we all listen to the Still Speaking God who is with us and inviting us into an unknowable future. If your community shares prayer requests, please include them, as you continue your prayers of petition.

Song for Prayer

Suggestion: "Come and Find the Quiet Corner" - S E Murray, BEACH SPRING (#575 Chalice)

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Imagine the sanctuary where you usually worship. Let the memory of your Beloved Community fill your soul and let us pray together the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We Give Thanks

Offering

Let us remember that even though we are not gathering in our church buildings our churches' ministries continue. Volunteers and staff are still working. We continue to fund and support other non-profits. We pay our bills. Support a local church with your prayers and goodwill, as well as with donations of time and treasure. Offer these gifts in gratitude for the Living God who may be found within and far beyond the walls of our sacred properties. (see donation footnote)

Song of Gratitude

*Suggestions: "Who is My Mother, Who is My Brother?" - S E Murray, KINDRED (#486 Chalice)
video: https://youtu.be/hq_n_sx02Kg (lyrics in previous LL service)*

We Continue in Hope

Song of Hope:

Suggestion: "Spirit of the Living God" - D Iverson, LIVING GOD (#259 New Century, #HOL 390)

Benediction

When we miss each other and our favorite places, let us remember:
In God we live, and move, and have our being.

When we feel a kind breeze on our face, let us remember:
In God we live, and move, and have our being.

When the future lurks unpredictable and frightening, let us remember:
In God we live, and move, and have our being.

When sorrowful tears fall from our eyes, let us remember:
In God we live, and move, and have our being.

When hope sprouts, tender and green, let us remember:
In God we live, and move, and have our being. Amen.

✠ *this concludes the service* ✠

Online Chalice Hymnal: <https://hymnary.org/hymnal/CH1995>

Online New Century Hymnal: <https://hymnary.org/hymnal/NCH1995>

HOL: [Hymns of Life](#), bilingual hymnal. ©1986, China Alliance Press.

YouTube Music Videos: search by title AND one of the authors for best results

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