

“WE HAD HOPED” – THE EMMAUS MOMENT

A Prayer Service

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Setting the Environment

For a service within the church, set up two chairs in the front for the presiders, place a microphone in front of the chairs and place an unlit candle on a stand or table to one side along with two baskets. Distribute index cards and pencils or pens throughout the pews. Finally, make sure the pianist (or other musician) can easily see the presiders.

For a hall or other gathering place, create an intimate setting, with chairs curved in an oval or a semicircle. At one end of the oval, or between the ends of the semicircle, place the following:

- Two chairs for the presiders
- A microphone in front of chairs
- An unlit candle on a stand or table to one side

A musician (pianist) should be to one side.

Distribute index cards and pencils or pens on the chairs. Place two baskets near each end of the semicircle.

The Service

To begin the ceremony, one of the presiders rises from the chair and lights the candle.

Introduction

One presider then welcomes the group and describes the setting and the theme for the prayer service. Following the introduction, the presider invites everyone to join in singing “Gather Us In”:

Gather Us In

Here in this place, new light is streaming,
Now is the darkness, vanished away,
See, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,
Brought here to you in the light of this day.

Gather us in the lost and forsaken,
Gather us in the blind and the lame;
Call to us now, and we shall awaken,
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery,
We are the old who yearn for your face,
We have been sung throughout all of history,
Called to be light to the whole human race.

Gather us in the rich and the haughty,
Gather us in the proud and the strong;
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
Give us the courage to enter the song.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
Not in some heaven light years away,
But here in this place, the new light is shining,
Now is the kingdom, now is the day.

Gather us in and hold us forever,
Gather us in and make us your own;
Gather us in all peoples together,
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

PRAYER

Presider: Let us join our hearts and our minds and our spirits with Thomas Merton when he prayed:

MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust you always
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
And you will never leave me to face my perils alone .

Scripture (one of the presiders reads)

Luke 24: 13-35

A reading from the Gospel of Luke

That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus's disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred.

And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?"

They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?"

And he replied to them, "What sort of things?"

They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place.

Some women from our group, however, have astounded us; they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive.

Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see."

And Jesus said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and day is almost over." So Jesus went in to stay with them.

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said a blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight.

Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying: “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!”

Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Gospel of the Lord

[Pause for reflection]

The Emmaus Moment (the other presider reads)

The Emmaus Moment, Luke 24:13-35

That very same day a group of them were on their way into a common future, which lay just ahead, beyond what they could see.

As they walked into the future, they talked about all the happenings among them. As they talked with one another GOD joined them and moved with them.

But something kept them from seeing and understanding what was REALLY happening. So, God entered into their hearts and asked: **WHAT IS IT THAT TROUBLES YOU? WHAT ARE YOU WONDERING ABOUT? WHAT QUESTIONS UNSETTLE YOU?**

The group stopped, full of fear and anxiety, and began to reflect, saying:

We thought it would be simpler.

We thought our choices would be clearer.

We thought our values and priorities would be more evident.

We thought there would be more uniformity.

We thought we would agree more easily on basic issues.

We thought our resources were more extensive.

We thought God would lead us more directly.

We thought that doubts, conflicts, and confusion would lessen.

We thought that our common charism would ensure a common vision.

We had hoped our future would be uncomplicated.

We had hoped things would not be so messy.

We had hoped our experiences would confirm what we knew, not change it again.

We had hoped our familiar theories would still fit.

We had hoped.

We had hoped.

And now, some among us are saying that things are not as we first imagined them to be. Now some are saying that the future continues to challenge us in different ways: **IS THIS OF GOD?**

And God said: How slow you are as a group. How hard it is for you to trust. Have I not promised from the beginning to be with you, to sustain you, and to continually reveal my plans to hearts that are OPEN? Have I not promised you more than you can ask or imagine?

And God spent time going over the history of the people gathered, and the ways that mystery continues to be revealed. God raised up many ordinary events and interactions and showed the people gathered God's own way of being with them.

By the time the people had begun to understand the depth, the breadth, and height of the love of God for them, they were already one step further into the future.

They wondered if they could sustain that kind of hope. It felt as if God was not going to be present as clearly as they had thought. They invited God to remain with them and to continue to help them notice, celebrate and be open to the ongoing revelation – to walk through those doors into an unknown future.

And God chose to stay with the people.

God, and the people gathered, recognized the mystery at work among them, and they grew more confident and able to share it with others who needed to know if God's love could be counted on. They moved into their lives, trusting that what God has in store will be created together and will include more than the people could ever ask or imagine.

[Allow for 3-5 minutes of silent meditation]

Sharing in Pairs

Presider: It is important to put words to some of the thoughts and feelings these readings have inspired. Respecting your own personal comfort level, I would ask you with great gentleness to share with the person next to you some of the hopes you have had, or have right now, on your life/faith journey. We'll have about 10 minutes for this sharing.

Song

Presider: Let us take all these hopes and dreams and raise them to God in song, by singing “God, Beyond All Names.”

God, Beyond All Names

God, beyond our dreams, you have stirred in us a mem’ry;
You have placed your pow’rful spirit in the hearts of humankind.

Chorus: All around us we have known you, all creation lives to hold you.
In our living and our dying we are bringing you to birth.

God, beyond all names, you have made us in your image;
We are like you, we reflect you; we are woman, we are man.

Chorus

God, beyond all time, you are laboring within us;
We are moving, we are changing in your spirit ever new.

Chorus

OFFERING OF PRAYERS

A Presider: We are about to offer our prayers to God in a symbolic ritual. We ask you to use the cards and pencils in your seats and write your prayers on the cards. Do not rush; there will be plenty of time to formulate your prayers. They will NOT be read out loud, but you will put them in the baskets which the presiders will be holding. So let us commit to paper our prayers.

[Musician plays softly in the background while people are writing their prayers, about 5-10 minutes.]

A Presider: Please come up in two single-files and place your prayers in the basket(s).

After collecting all the prayers, the presider asks everyone to join hands, then lifts the basket and prays.

CLOSING PRAYER

A Presider: Let us close by joining our hearts in prayer with the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero:

It helps now and then to step back and take the long view.
The reign of God is not only beyond our efforts.
It is beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying the reign of God always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayers fully express our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
We cannot do everything but there is a sense of liberation in realizing that, because this enables us to do something and do it well.
It may be incomplete but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

Closing Song

You Are Mine

I will come to you in the silence,
I will lift you from all your fear.
You will hear my voice, I claim you as my choice,
Be still and know I am here.

I am hope for all who are hopeless, I am eyes for all who long to see.
In the shadows of the night, I will be your light
Come and rest in me.

Refrain: Do not be afraid, I am with you.
I have called you each by name.
Come and follow me, I will bring you home:
I love you and you are mine