

Reconciliation Offering Worship Materials

Prepared by Rev. Dr. Beth A. Rupe
Co-Facilitator CCIW Pro-Reconciliation Anti-Racism Team

Prayer of Confession

Let us pray. God who created a rainbow of individuals, we call out to you.

We confess that all around us differences are used to separate rather than enrich us. Suspicion seeps like poison into our hearts. Love of neighbor does not guide our interactions. We do not welcome the stranger but seek to build walls rather than bridges of understanding and good will.

Lord, we confess, that we are silent in the face of injustice and hate. We have not spoken truth, instead we have dwelt in denial ignoring the reality that when one suffers all suffers – failing to see that when one is diminished all are diminished. We desire our own comfort and given it the false name of security. We have been deaf to the prophets and have not listened to God word to fear not.

God of new beginnings and resurrected life, come and write your covenant on our hearts. We desire your instruction and long for your word so that we may learn the way of love. We hope Lord. We seek the fulfillment of the kingdom. We look forward to the day when all people will live in unity – when all will love you, O Lord, with heart and soul and mind and love others as they love themselves. We recommit our lives to your will, may our word and deeds reflect your will on earth as it is in heaven.

In the silence of this moment – we turn to you.

Time of silence

Assurance of Forgiveness

In scripture, we are told that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever, believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3: 16) We believe that through Christ Jesus we have been reconciled to God. We are forgiven and have received God’s promises. Therefore, we will seek to love as we have been loved. We will seek to reconcile as we have been reconciled.

Corporate Lament

O Lord, we need you,
Our hearts are heavy.
The blood of the fallen cries out from Charleston, Ferguson, San Bernardino,
Orlando, Baltimore, Dallas, North Miami....
We see how the demons of anger and violence can ultimately destroy us all.

We hear the cries of Rachel - of fathers and mothers across our country,
Whose arms long for their child.
Whose hearts ache for their child.
Whose minds are besieged by incomprehensible loss.

We hear the cries of community members
Overwhelmed by pain, as they sit their children down for "the talk"
Weighed down by sadness, as they see their young men wasting away in
prison cells.
Frustrated by systems that dehumanize and denigrate.

We hear the cries of refugees and immigrants
Fearful that their families will be torn apart.
Dreading that they will be returned to places of despair and great violence.
Terrorized as they are misused and abused as modern day slaves.

How long, O Lord, how long will it be until we turn our hearts to you. How long, O
Lord, until the refining fire burns away intolerance and fear, hate and
misunderstanding. How long, O Lord until we claim the reality of the Beloved
Community and let go of the illusion that we can be whole while we continue to tear
others apart.

Hear us, O Lord our God, for we trust in your steadfast love and rejoice in your
salvation. You have heard the cries of your people from slave huts and from exile.
You have sent your Son, to show us the way and to call us back to live in love. Do not
let us forget your name or be lured by the demons of hate and violence. Hear our
prayers, O Lord for you are merciful and faithful to those who turn to you.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Blessing As We Engage in the Work of Dismantling Racism

God of the prophets, we thank you for voices that will not be silenced in the face of
injustice and violence. Like Amos, we cry for justice to roll down like waters and
righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Like Ezekiel, we call for the powerful of
our time to put away violence and destruction and practice justice and

righteousness. Like Micah, we desire to be a people who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

We thank you those who seek to shine the light of justice in the midst of darkness even as they refuse to return violence for violence. For too long, so many of our brothers and sisters of color have been told they must wait. They have been told that they are in too big of a hurry. We thank you for those who know that now is the time. May we, your church, seek to stand and work in solidarity with those who seek to identify and dismantle systems of discrimination and oppression. May we find our voice to meet the challenge of this time. May we be filled with a reasonable impatience that refuses to wait any longer as the sin of racism festers and infections our relationships and our society.

We ask, O Lord, that you wrap your arms around those who engage in the work of pro-reconciliation. Guide their steps and gird them with your strength, O Lord. Surround them with co-workers so that they will not come to believe that they are alone. Send your Spirit of wisdom to guide their decisions and direct their paths. May they know your steadfast love and reflect that love in what they do and say. Amen.

Sermon Suggestion

Habakkuk 1: 1-5

Background

The prophet Habakkuk expresses the understanding that faithful people live just lives. He identifies injustice in the political, judicial and economic institutions of Judah and particularly its capital Jerusalem. Habakkuk prophesies that these unjust systems will result in God's judgment upon the leaders. While Habakkuk believes that God will reestablish equity, he pays particular attention to the entrenchment of injustice in the world.

The beginning of Habakkuk is reminiscent of the prayers of lament that are structured expressions for ourselves and others that name the disparity between experienced reality and the world as God intends. These bold and powerful prayers are rooted in the understanding the God is concerned for us and God hears us when we pray. Habakkuk's prayer of lament is truncated in that it does not include a vow of praise for God's anticipated intervention. This structure may be a due to Habakkuk's concern with the pervasive injustice in Judah.

It has been suggested that in Habakkuk's opening speech he engages in an argument with God. Taking the side of the oppressed, Habakkuk now proceeds to make their case. He is even willing to challenge God for God's inactivity.¹ Clearly, Habakkuk

¹ Theodore Hiebert "The Book of Habakkuk: Introductions, Commentary and Reflections" in *The New Interpreter's Bible Study: General Articles and Introduction*,

believes in a just God and the current reality is incongruent with the world that just God intends.

Suggested Sermon Outline

1. Begin one's sermon with a parallel structure to Habakkuk. Engage in a conversation with God asking "How Long" identify specific events that seem incongruent with the racial harmony and equitable social structure that God intends.
2. Pivot from Habakkuk's structure to his core message that justice characterizes the life of the faithful. Provide specific examples of how this is taking place in the midst of current systems of injustice.
3. Conclude with a called to participate in the Beloved Community with examples of how your congregation can or is doing this. You may want to conclude the lament with praise that God's promises will be fulfilled for God is steadfast and just.