



## Presbyterians Sharing Sunday

### 2017 Worship Resource

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#### Welcome

Today we celebrate the mission and ministry we do together – with Presbyterians across Canada and around the world – through our gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing*. By pooling our resources, we are supporting visionary leaders, creating empowering resources and making connections to do things we couldn't do on our own.

As a church, we have committed to

- equip congregations, ministries and presbyteries
- engage in evangelism, outreach and discipleship
- embrace mission locally, nationally and internationally
- provide tools for faithful ministry
- create and supporting new faith communities
- engage in healing and reconciliation
- support biblical and theological reflection and dialogue
- discern, prepare and support visionary leadership
- pursue spiritual renewal
- live out God's call to justice
- empower youth
- and
- worship together

It's a large and exciting list of vibrant mission and ministry, made possible with our gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing*. Together we are proclaiming the good news of the gospel in Canada and around the world!

Come, let us worship God.

#### Scripture Readings

- Jonah 3: 10-4: 4
- Psalms 145: 1-8
- Philippians 1: 1-11 (21-30)
- Matthew 20: 1-16

#### Hymn suggestions

- 423 - Sing your praise to God eternal
- 632 - Help us accept each other
- 296 - The clay stained hands of love
- 324 - Great is thy faithfulness
- 587 - Called as partners in Christ's service
- 717 - We cannot own the sunlit sky
- 560 - Put peace into each other's hands

## We Approach God

### Call to Worship

(drawn from Psalm 145)

Great is the Lord

**and greatly to be praised!**

The Lord is faithful in every word

**and gracious in every deed.**

Let us offer God all praise and worship.

**Let us bless God's holy name together.**

### Prayer of Adoration

Ever faithful God,

your call to us is grace itself;

your word to us is hope and life;

your gift to us is Jesus Christ -

risen and redeeming your whole Creation.

We come together joyfully,

delighted to honour your work in our midst.

Lead us now by your Spirit

that we might see the sacred in one another

and so bring your kingdom closer. Amen

### Unison prayer of confession

**Fearless, forgiving God;**

**though we would call ourselves your servants**

**we confess that we have, too often, served only ourselves**

**we have squandered your gifts;**

**we have saddened your spirit;**

**our single-mindedness grieves your generous heart.**

**Keep us from resenting your justice;**

**help us to understand the nature of your compassion;**

**urge us to new expressions of mercy and generosity**

**guided by your boundless love,**

**that was given flesh and breath in Jesus.**

(we observe a sacred silence)

**One** - so may it be

**ALL** - So let it be.

### Assurance of Pardon

One - What does the Lord require of you? God has told us what is good;

**ALL** - **Love justice, seek kindness, walk humbly with God.**

One - That we might free ourselves to follow God,

we have been given Jesus;

**ALL** - **whose life, death and resurrection draw us into God's forgiveness.**

One - Beloved, know that in Christ, you are forgiven.

Open your hearts to God's gift,

and find peace with God and one another.

**ALL** - **Thanks be to God! Amen**

## Children's Story

### **Needed:**

- A big bunch of grapes
- 3 containers – one large, one medium, one small
- Paper money (you can cut out rectangles and draw a big dollar sign on each)

Today we are talking about the idea of “fairness”.

I'm going to choose three volunteers and ask you each to do some work for me, and I will give you some paper money as payment.

*Volunteer #1 (Choose an older child first, someone who can count to 20)*

“Please pick 20 grapes off of this bunch, and put them into the large container. I will give you 20 pieces of paper money. Do you agree?”

*(Wait until task is done.)*

*Volunteer #2:*

“Please pick 10 grapes and put them in the medium-sized bowl. I will pay you what is fair. Do you agree?”

*(Wait until task is done.)*

*Volunteer #3:*

Please pick 1 grape and put it in the smallest bowl. I will pay you what is fair. Do you agree?

*(Wait until task is done.)*

Now, I will pay each of you for the good work that you have done for me.

For picking 20 grapes, you get 20 pieces of paper money. (Give \$20 to Volunteer 1)

For picking 10 grapes, you get... 20 pieces of paper money. (Give \$20 Volunteer 2)

For picking 1 grape, you get... 20 pieces of paper money. (give \$20 Volunteer 3)

*(Children have a strong sense of right and wrong, fair and not fair. The kids might be grumbling, or talking amongst themselves, or saying, “that’s not fair!”)*

Is there something wrong here? What is it? Everyone did a good job, right? They all did the job I asked them to do? And they all got paid what they agreed to?

It doesn't seem fair, does it? The worker who picked twenty grapes worked longer and harder than the other two. But it is my money to share – and I wanted to be generous to all three workers – after all, each one did as I asked. It's kind of a hard lesson to learn, isn't it?

Sometimes it's hard not to feel envious about the things that other people have. And sometimes we feel like we deserve more. But God gives each of us generous gifts – food to eat, water to drink, sunshine and shade, families and friends who love us. And because God is so generous, Christians are supposed to be generous too.

*Let us pray*

Dear God,

Thank you for all of the good gifts you have given to us. Please help us to be thankful for what we have, and not envious of what others have. Help us to be generous and to share what we have, to show your love. In Jesus' name,

Amen

## We Listen to God's Word

### **Prayer for Understanding**

Merciful Master, speak to us in new ways through these familiar, beloved words.  
Bring our rushing thoughts to rest and our hardened hearts to life.  
Bring peace to us through your word to us today, through Christ our Risen Lord. Amen.

### **Meditation: God tears the fence down**

Jesus used parables to describe the indescribable. These well-worn stories are portraits of the character of God, and signposts that point to God's coming reign of justice and peace. They not only describe the indescribable – they also describe the unimaginable for us, living as we do by our own wits. Whatever dream God had for Creation, we have made a world where effort is rewarded; where the weak know that their only defense is to be stronger. In this world, justice is not always just, and generosity is a rare gift, found occasionally among equals and less often across the boundaries of wealth, power and privilege. So when Jesus offers a parable, he speaks against our habits; against our common knowledge. He invites us to consider an alternative that is God's desire for creation, and God's promised hope for humanity.

Inequality in the workplace is an all too common complaint in our world. It surfaces in arguments about minimum wage, and is expressed in a multitude of ways across the country and around the world. Those who pretend to understand economics talk about supply and demand, and pepper presentations with charts and graphs in an attempt to explain why the world is divided into those who have much, and those who have little. But explanations don't feed a family, or give a labourer a sense of purpose or accomplishment.

In this parable, Jesus tells of a landowner who is looking for people to work in his vineyard. At the beginning of the day, he finds some labourers, agrees what to pay them, and then sends them to work. He does the same thing at nine, noon, three and five o'clock and each time he finds people who haven't been hired yet. He tells them "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right."

This could be a trick - an appeal to those still without work at the end of the day to see how desperate they are. But this is a parable, and we are surprised at the end when those who began work at the end of the day receive the same wage as those who began first thing in the morning. Naturally, those who worked all day in the scorching sun begin to grumble – why should those who worked only an hour get paid the same? But the landowner says he paid them what they agreed – why should it matter that he paid the last people the same?

Have you seen the cartoon that shows the difference between justice and equality? Three people are trying to watch a ball game through a fence. Each is a different height. In the first scene, each person stands on a step that is the same height. This is equality – each had the same size step, but only the tallest person was able to see over the fence. In the next scene, each person stands on a step of a size that best suits them. And each can see over the fence. This is justice.

But Jesus' parable goes beyond justice: **God tears the fence down**, offering love and grace and justice for all. Through this parable, Jesus pulls back the curtain to see what is possible, what is desirable and what is longed for by God.

The beauty of the gospel - the treasure that is Christ risen - is that God's power eliminates the barriers we would use to organize the world. Work and rest are distinct from one another, guarded by rules and restrictions. Life and death are separate and always in tension. But when we see the work of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we see those human boundaries are ignored. In God's world, hope is offered against expectation; the 'least of these' are considered equally; tears are turned into laughter; the blind given sight. These things shouldn't happen - except that God disdains our ordering of God's creation. That all the workers receive the same wage for different hours worked seems to be a travesty of justice. But it is, in fact, a re-definition of justice and a reminder that God's justice is first and foremost the embodiment of God's generous grace.

As those who have declared themselves followers of Jesus, we in the Presbyterian Church in Canada are on a path, not just to discover the new thing that God has done through Jesus Christ, but to embody God's hope, God's love and God's abundant life in our lives. That is the impulse behind our worship, and the mission projects that grace our communities and enhance the lives of neighbours and strangers among us.

As a denomination, one way we express our desire to follow Jesus is through our support of *Presbyterians Sharing*. It is our attempt as Presbyterian congregations to bring Jesus' parable to life - to live out the grace that we have experienced in Jesus, and to share that grace as widely as possible. When Presbyterians from across Canada join together to share in mission and ministry through *Presbyterians Sharing*, we are collectively putting our faith into action – across Canada and around the world. And we are working to create a world according to God's vision – where all have equal access to God's love and grace. By pooling our resources, we support leaders, create resources and connect together to do things we couldn't do on our own.

Together we are able to proclaim a message of God's hope through our actions.  
Let me share with you just a few of the ways this is being lived out.

### *Supporting congregations*

Congregations across Canada share the gospel in word and action – vibrant expressions of God's love. Congregations helping congregations is at the core of *Presbyterians Sharing*. Together, we are equipping congregations, ministries and presbyteries by providing materials and resources for faithful ministry, supporting theological education, encouraging visionary leaders, supporting mentorship and providing grants to start new congregations and renew established ones.

And it is working. Congregations are stepping out of their comfort zones to try new things and witness to the resurrection of Christ in new ways.

La Communauté chrétienne Siloé in Montreal, QC is a small but mighty and growing congregation offering Presbyterian worship in French. The Rev. Eloi Agbanou shares: "We thank the Lord Jesus Christ for the progress of our community. Our progress is neither the result of my strength, nor of any human strength. I just see the strong and powerful hands of God over Siloé's growth."

Members from St. Luke's Church, Bathurst, New Brunswick, where we are supporting renewal through a regional ministry say, "Working together in service for others has strengthened our faith as we support each other and the wider community. There is great power in prayer. We thank God for all who have encouraged us in our journey of faith."

The Rev. Deb Rapport participated in a PCC mentoring program to support her leadership in Toronto's ARISE Ministry, which provides outreach and pastoral care to human trafficking victims and people involved in the sex trade. She shares, "I have grown and strengthened my leadership capabilities through this process. I have been blessed and encouraged by the coaching, guidance and wisdom of my mentor."

### *Offering hope*

Another way we help live out God's vision of abundant life through *Presbyterians Sharing* is by supporting ministries in Canada that reach out to some of Canada's most vulnerable people: refugees, Indigenous communities and inner-city communities. These include ministries like Tyndale St.-Georges and Action Réfugiés in Montréal, ARISE Ministry in Toronto and seven ministries serving primarily Indigenous people, including Kenora Fellowship Centre, Winnipeg Inner City Missions, Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry and Hummingbird Ministry in BC.

And lives are transformed. Lives of people like Jane, who participated in Tyndale St.-George's employment program in the Little Burgundy neighbourhood in southwest Montreal.

The statistics for Little Burgundy are grim: 2/3 of children and youth live below the poverty line and 32% of students drop out before finishing high school. But Tyndale St.-Georges is helping provide community members— children, teens and adults -- with the tools they need to realize their own dreams, at every life stage. Tyndale's employment programs not only teach job search techniques, but also build self-esteem and life skills. Jane shares, "I came to Tyndale during the lowest time in my life, and I decided to give it a shot. I was looking for something to bring back my self-confidence that would enable me to go back to the workforce. And Tyndale delivered exactly what I was looking for. And now I'm strong – I'm back again – and I'm ready to go back to work!"

You don't have to look very far to see and hear stories of the tragic legacy of the Indian residential schools. *Presbyterians Sharing* is helping congregations and individuals walk alongside Indigenous people on a journey toward reconciliation. In June, 33 Presbyterians from across Canada travelled together to visit three of the PCC's seven Indigenous ministries, worship at Mistawasis church – the only PCC church on a reserve, and visit the sites where two residential schools were run by the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The group listened to stories of anger and pain and offered apologies. They also witnessed some of the ways in which PCC ministries are transforming lives.

At Birdtail Sioux First Nation, site of the Birtle residential school, Doug Hanska thanked the visitors with an honour song. He explains, "The stop they did in Birdtail, I know it may not mean much to a lot of people, but to some of us it means a lot," he said. "We can forgive and move on, like our teachings tell us."

Lynn Vissers, a member of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in King City, Ontario, and participant on the tour shared, "The journey has only just begun for me. This will be a long journey of building relationships. I hope that I can help light a passion in others for the work that needs to be done in restoring relationships of dignity, kindness, and love for our Indigenous sisters and brothers."

### *Supporting international mission partners*

Our efforts at tearing down walls don't stop in Canada. In a broken world desperate for God's vision of grace and justice, our gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing* support international mission partners by sending mission staff and short term volunteers and providing grants.

The Rev. Dr. Paul McLean has been working with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan for more than 30 years, helping them translate the bible into Indigenous languages so that people can begin to really know the gospel in the language of their hearts. Jackie Bannerman, a young adult intern, recently spent eight months in Hungary supporting the refugee ministries of our partner, the Reformed Church of Hungary. And Dr. Nick Bauman is serving with the United Mission to Nepal for two years, training doctors and performing surgeries as a General Surgeon at the hospital in Tansen.

In the Middle East – probably one of the hardest places to be a Christian – *Presbyterians Sharing* supports the Near East School of Theology as they equip Christian leaders to serve congregations there and maintain a Christian witness of peace in the turbulent countries of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian territories.

This September, the Rev. Blair and Vivian Bertrand began a three year term with the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian in Malawi. Blair will support leadership development through the Blantyre Synod's youth department, Zomba Theological College and the Theological Education by Extension program. And Vivian hopes to support the Synod's work combating poverty. Blair feels called to this mission, and shares that "to be sent is to participate in the mission of God." Vivian adds, "As Christians, we are called into relationship. My understanding of mission centers around the idea that we are all impoverished in our own way, and as humans living in this world, through the grace of God, we have something to offer our brothers and sisters."

These are just glimpses into some of the ways gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing* are making a difference in the lives of thousands of people – across Canada and around the world.

We have not perfectly learned the lessons of Jesus. Our efforts at grace are still marked by our human impulse to manage, and to control. We are still ruled by historical definitions of justice and equality - rooted in what we call fairness - and we forget that God in Christ has eliminated human boundaries, knocked down the fences and opened us to infinite possibilities in God's generous grace. We might be tempted, as those in the parable were tempted, to resent such generosity. But led by the Spirit, perhaps we can be inspired by it.

By our witness, through our participation in the many projects supported by *Presbyterians Sharing*, may we be tempted to a broader experience of God's generosity. And may we see God's reign of justice and peace brought closer to all.

## **We Respond to God**

### **Dedication of the Gifts/Offering**

The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it: the world, and those who live in it.  
Let us honour the generosity of God as we present our gifts and ourselves.

Blessed are you, eternal God. You have set Creation before us, and charged us with its care.  
You have provided all that we need to become the people you have called us to be.

We pledge these gifts, the work of our hands and the joy of our hearts,  
to your service and the building up of your kingdom of grace and peace.  
Bless us in our sharing, and bless all to your service.

We ask and offer all these things through Jesus Christ, our living Lord. Amen

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Living, life-giving God  
your creation astounds us.  
The beauty of this day  
offers us a glimpse of your creative power.  
The steady progress of the seasons,  
the grand procession of the years,  
all point to your faithful, eternal nature.  
We rejoice in the legacy of faithfulness  
that is revealed by your word;  
that is ours in this particular community of faith;  
that is made known by the continuing witness of your earthly church.

Our brief moments of praise -  
these humble prayers of thanksgiving -  
are hardly enough to express our privilege and our joy  
at being called your covenant partners.  
Yet we are bold to offer you our prayers;  
of thanksgiving for the leading of your Spirit;  
of joy and delight at the signs of your grace;  
of praise for the partnerships, formed in faith,  
that allow your church to test boundaries,  
and overcome obstacles,  
and witness to your triumph over death in the Risen Christ.

Made bold by Christ, we also pray  
for those whose experience of justice has been tainted by greed.  
Free us to tell the story of the nature of your grace.

We pray that the vision of the church  
might not be hampered by our concerns about resources;  
remind us of the abundance that is ours by your love.  
May we find, in your abundance,  
new ways to offer peace to those who suffer,  
and hope to those who are fearful.

Give us wisdom for the way forward  
that we might continue to share with others,  
what you have so willingly shared with us.  
We ask all this in the name of Him who taught us to pray together:

**Our Father...**

### **Commissioning & Benediction**

Go in the peace of Christ and share his love with those near and far.  
Trust that God will use your generosity to do amazing things.  
And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in  
hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

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*The 2017 Presbyterians Sharing Sunday worship service was prepared by the Rev. Jeff Lackie, minister at Sutherland's River Presbyterian Church and Union Presbyterian Church, in Thorburn, Nova Scotia. The children's story was written by Heather Chappell, Stewardship & Planned Giving Program Coordinator, The Presbyterian Church in Canada.*

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*Photos will also be posted online at [presbyterian.ca/sharing](http://presbyterian.ca/sharing) if you would like to project them during the sermon.*