

Worship Resources for PNMC Congregations June 28, 2020

Thanks be to God!

2020 has been a year of unplanned changes. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world and in our neighborhoods, we reacted by physically distancing from one another, including canceling our PNMC Annual Gathering. The plans we had made were disrupted. But, we are still God's people, connected by the Spirit in ways we do not always understand. As I have seen your congregations respond to changing demands and needs, I have been surprised to find myself filled with gratitude.

And now, in the past week, as the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police has sparked a movement in our country confronting state violence and pressing toward the healing of the deep wound of racism, we may feel disrupted again. And still, I find myself surprised by moments of gratitude.

I wonder what it would look like for PNMC to be a community of gratitude, together and apart in this time of disease, of division, of distress. And so, I offer these worship materials to be used on what would have been the weekend of our Annual Gathering, in the hope that despite being separated by distance, we might worship together, give thanks together, and know that through the Spirit, God makes us one.

Diana Butler Bass's book *Grateful* has helped to shape my understanding of gratitude and these materials.

Focus: *"Thank you" is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.* – Alice Walker

Gratefulness grounds our lives in the world and with others, always locating the gifts and grace that accompany our way. . . . To be grateful in these days is an act of resistance, of resilience, of renewal. – Diana Butler Bass

Call to Worship: (this can be divided into Leader and People, or into several readers, or read by one leader depending on your situation)

One: O give thanks to the Lord for God is good,
Response: God's steadfast love endures forever.

One: God has called us together with congregations spread across the Pacific Northwest.
Speaker: We live in cities, small towns, and rural areas.
Speaker: We worship in English, Spanish, French, and Swahili.
Speaker: We gather in groups of 10 and 200; in homes, church buildings, parks, and online.

One: O give thanks to the Lord for God is good,
Response: God's steadfast love endures forever.

One: God has called us together with congregations spread across the Pacific Northwest.

Speaker: To be followers of Jesus

Speaker: To witness to God's peace

Speaker: To experience transformation by the Holy Spirit.

One: O give thanks to the Lord for God is good,

Response: God's steadfast love endures forever.

One: God has called us together with congregations spread across the Pacific Northwest to worship today. Together though apart, God hears our voices as we gather and give thanks to the God who is good.

Response: God's steadfast love endures forever

Suggested scriptures and sermon prompts:

Psalm 9/10 – These two Psalms pair together and follow an acrostic pattern when put together. The lament of Psalm 10 and prayer for deliverance is preceded by the song of thanksgiving in Psalm 9. In both, God is proclaimed as the One who can deliver the oppressed and remembers the needy. What does it mean to hold in tension the cries of lament of those being victimized that tear at our hearts, and the words of thanksgiving for what we know is God's plan of liberation for those who are oppressed?

Luke 17:11-19 – this story is often used to illustrate the importance of gratitude for what God has done, but notice the element of surprise, of the unexpected – they went to the priests, not knowing what would happen there, and on the way discovered they had been healed. That discovery turned one man around to find Jesus and give thanks. Where have we discovered something new that turns us around toward Jesus and gratitude?

I Thess. 5:16-18 – We are called to give thanks not for everything, but in everything. In, within, throughout is the place of thanksgiving. "Sometimes the world turns on a preposition" (DBB). Where have you been surrounded by things for which you were not grateful and yet discovered that in that place you were surprised by feeling of gratitude? This is also a call to a practice – of on-going praise, prayer, and thanksgiving. How can those habits be developed and sustained even in difficult circumstances?

Prayer:

God, giver of life and hope and love,

God, the one we turn to with our tears and our thanksgivings,

We come to you this morning together with all the congregations who call ourselves the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference.

We have much to lament and to confess in these days.

We lament that we cannot gather as a conference of congregations this weekend and confess that we have not always worked to develop relationships with each other.

We lament the disruption in our ways of being church and connecting with each other and confess that we have often done only what was easy and traditional for us.

We lament the death of over 100,000 killed by the coronavirus in our country, including our own brother from the Jerusalem congregation, and confess that we have not shared the burden of disease nor of access to health care.

We lament the racial violence done to black bodies by forces we support with our money, and confess that we have been silent too long and ignored the reality of racism in our own lives.

We lament the rise in unemployment and bankruptcies in our nation, and confess that we have not given from our treasure to care for the needy.

Hear our cries of grief and our words of repentance.
Grant to us your grace.

(Silence)

Surprise us with your grace and healing, O God,
that we might find ourselves being made whole
and turn to find you in thanksgiving.

We have much to be thankful for in these days.

We give thanks for your Spirit blowing a fresh wind,
through our lives, through our churches, through our streets,
and we are grateful for your invitation to move with that wind.

We give thanks for old relationships given new life as we worship online
and we are grateful for new relationships fostered by creative ways of engaging.

We give thanks for opportunities to share our wealth in mutual aid
and our privilege in confronting power with truth,
and we are grateful for strength when we falter.

We give thanks for companions on our journey,
for the network of care you have woven between our congregations,
for the resources of our denomination,
and we are grateful that we are not alone.

(Silence)

We pray together across the miles,
in the hope that we might be made one,
in the faith that you walk with us,
and surrounded by the love made known to us by Jesus, our Lord.

May we be the church for one another and for the world,
In Christ's name we pray,
Amen.

Video: a 6 minute YouTube video with pictures from across our conference and words from the ECM's report to the delegates will be made available to you in the next week. The link will be sent via email to the pastors mailing list.

Benediction:

As God's people spread across the Pacific Northwest;
Go with gratitude.
Go with peace.
Go with courage.
Thanks be to God!