



# *For Such a Time as This*

## Prayer Meeting/Prayer Service Resource Lent 2017

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### **Introduction**

This Lent we are invited to join with individuals and congregations across Alberta and Northwest Conference to start or continue prayer practices and spiritual disciplines. We especially will focus on intercessory prayer by praying for the concerns of the community, the sick of the congregation and guidance for the Church during this time of transition.

### **Preparation for using this prayer service resource**

The following resource can be led by lay or ordered leader(s). It can be used as a single prayer service, or as a weekly service during Lent. You can change the resource to fit your context which can be used in a home, meeting space or church sanctuary.

If possible the meeting/prayer space should feature a small table with jewel-like stones. Participants will take the stones home with them each week (or at the end of a one-time prayer service). You may also wish to include a candle, Bible, prayer shawl and other sacred symbols in your space.

Light reflecting in stone and light being our central symbol for this ritual, you may want to (ahead of time) make jewel toned ice cubes (adding a drop of colouring or juices to your trays) and have them there for water glasses after the prayer time (or during it).

If you will be including an Ash Wednesday service in your Lent gatherings, it would work well to use the **Preparation for the Journey** prayers found in Ash Wednesday Service B in *Celebrate God's Presence* on page 144-5 as an opening to the following.

Hymns could include those listed in indexes of hymn books under "Lent" as well as from *More Voices*: 62 to 65, 162 and 174 to 176.

**WELCOME** (the leader welcomes the people)

**OPENING**

*On that day the Lord their God will save the people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine in God's land. For how great is the goodness of our Creator, and how great God's beauty!*

These are words from the prophet Zechariah. (9: 16-17). "Like the jewels of a crown" it says, God's people will shine in the land". Isn't that beautiful??

In this time of watching and waiting and walking with Jesus

toward Jerusalem

toward his death

and toward what watches and waits and walks beyond

in this time, we gather as God's people here in \_\_\_\_\_ church/community/pastoral charge, together with our sisters and brothers in Alberta and Northwest Conference, for deliberate and disciplined prayer. We gather that we might shine like jewels in a crown, in the land and in the life that is ours, and that ultimately belongs to God.

We gather with intent.

The time we set aside during Lent will be dedicated to specific prayer concerns

but also, in the Way of the Spirit, our prayer time will be open and spacious

seeking and gracious

ready for whatever the Silence may reveal, what light may emerge from within the jewels of our praying.

And so...before we move to more words,

let's be silent and let the Mystery enfold us.

**REFLECTION PART ONE: GIVE EACH PERSON A "JEWEL"**

In the silence I invite you to become clear in your own mind and heart...what is your intent for this time of prayer?

Take this jewel. Hold it - hold it up and see how the light catches it...shines through it, differently depending on what angle you look through.... feel how it is cool to the touch and then warms with the heat of your own body. Your hands, making this small wonder warm. Focus on that jewel as you keep silent,

let it be for you a sign of God's gracious presence, and your own intent for this time of prayer.

SILENCE IS KEPT...PERHAPS 5 MINUTES?

IF IT SEEMS RIGHT AFTER THE SILENCE, PEOPLE MIGHT WANT TO SHARE THEIR OWN INTENT, OR IF NOT, JUST LET IT BE AND MOVE ON

Whatever your own intent for this time, rest assured that it is GOD'S intent to be with us here and to speak a word of life.

PART TWO: FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER

In the book of Esther, Esther finds herself Queen in a country that is not her own. She is Jewish. She is the Queen of Persia, and no one knows she's a Jew. Her uncle Mordecai had advised her strongly to keep this part of herself to herself.

years went by.

she stayed silent.

It came to pass that a plot was revealed.....that all the Jews in Persia were about to be slaughtered. Her uncle Mordecai goes to Esther and says "THIS is the time. This is the time to speak out. If you stay silent at such a time as this...."

and then he says

"Maybe you were born for just such a time as this"

It is not the intent of this reflection to begin a discussion on fatalism or to say that God places us in positions apart from our own will. We are where we are. *However* it has happened that you are where you are, at this moment in history, in this church, The United Church of Canada, at this time of our common life.... however that has come to pass..... those words ring.

And they shine, don't you find?

*If you stay silent at such a time as this....*

and

*Maybe you were born for just such a time as this.*

We, like Esther, have positions of privilege. She was queen, and had a measure of power because of it. We are Canadians, most of us live with enough to eat, with shelter, and we've had some education. We can pray and act in relative freedom.

From our position of privilege, we choose to do so now, during this time of Lent, for the sake of the world. In such a time as this. Hold your jewel now: let it be a sign of your privilege as we pray.

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION** (see below) followed by the Lord's Prayer.

**CLOSING:** Take your jewel with you as you go. Keep it in the car, in your backpack, in the pocket of your jeans, by your desk. Somewhere it will shine as a reminder. As a call. As a comfort. As a hope. Remember that you are a precious jewel in God's sight, reflecting the Light. And go to seek the commonwealth of God, which, like a pearl of great price hidden in a field, is worth everything. Go in Peace.

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

If you are doing a Lent series, use the following as starting places for your prayers. If you are doing one-time gathering, please choose areas that your community will be focusing on in their ministries this year.

**ASH WEDNESDAY, March 1** (You may choose to have one or more of your jewels or stones covered with mud and dirt.)

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 3*

God of all seasons, in your pattern of things there is a time for keeping and a time for losing; a time for building up and a time for pulling down.

In this holy season of Lent, as we journey to the cross, help us to discern in our lives what we must lay down and what we must take up; what we must end and what we must begin.

Give us grace to lead a disciplined life, in glad faithfulness and with the joy which comes from a closer walk with Christ, Amen (CGP, 159, 5G006)

This Wednesday, where we begin to intentionally ponder that following Jesus means following him to the cross, we pray for all who are beginning new journeys. We are mindful, you have called our whole Conference of United Church circles to gather to receive God's grace. We ask you to be tangible to those who have no circles to gather within, and ask your courage to invite them to join us on this journey of prayer and reflection.

After the Scripture and prayer, invite all to pray in silence or aloud as you wish. You may want to use the chorus "God, Listen to your Children Praying" #400 VU at the beginning and/or end.

**(May be used during LENT ONE March 2-5, if part of a series of Lenten services)**

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,*

*‘Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.’”* Matthew 6: 8-10

Jesus Christ, vulnerable and alone, in the desert you faced the force of evil yet withstood temptation. Be with us in our struggles and temptation, that by your strength we may reject the devil in what ever form it comes. (CGP, 157, 5G005)

God, we come before you ... you who are within our breath, in prayer. This initial week of Lent, we have begun to intentionally ponder what following Jesus may mean. We are mindful that for many, the 40 days of no food or friends is not a story in a book. It is daily life. Those who are poor, the unemployed, the underpaid and all those facing financial difficulties are all around, and right within our circles. We ask for your courage to proclaim that sharing of resources and just wages are a condition of the kingdom of Christ; an invitation, a call and a claim. May we, when budgets tighten and cutbacks imprison, worship you our God and serve only you, by serving all in our midst. Amen.

**(May be used during LENT 2 (March 6-12) if doing a series of Lenten services)**

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.*

*<sup>2</sup> My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.*

*<sup>3</sup> He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.*

*<sup>4</sup> Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

*<sup>5</sup> The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.*

*<sup>6</sup> The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.*

*<sup>7</sup> The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.*

*<sup>8</sup> The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.*

Psalm 121

God of ancient days and covenants, thank you for poets and artists who show us the truth in their creative ways. May we be awakened by ancient words to kindle anew a faith in you – Ancient and yet ever new. You who formed the earth, we pray today for all whose lives have been shattered by natural disasters. Those who have seen fire rage through their home towns, those who have seen waters rise up into churches and businesses, those who have had the earth below shaken or the wind tear away loved

ones. In all things you are all that roots us to the earth, to life and to one another. Remind us to cling to Christ and strengthen our relationships to all creation. May we live with respect in Creation and share all we can to those who lose all they have. Amen

**(May be used during LENT 3 (March 13-19) if part of series of Lenten services)**

*Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." John 4: 10*

If we knew...Oh God, thank you that our ancestors of faith held on to the stories of your love and compassion for all peoples. Thank you that you held on to us; humans who you made full of diversity and who resist change and yes, resist diversity. We must take the gifts of our ancestors' faith along with their sins. And so this day we pray for forgiveness, grace and reconciliation. We are sorry that we have continued to divide (through actions and inaction) peoples into categories of colour, cultures, religions. Please continue to send your living waters into all peoples and healing love to those hurt by discrimination. Show us those waters, sparking like jewels as the light of your Love shines on them. May our hearts be tuned to the sound of justice flowing like water, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. May our compassion be fluid and our thinking supple. Help us to know your refreshing grace and to expand our love [to be] beyond our prejudices. Amen

**(May be used during LENT 4 (March 20-26) if part of a series of Lenten services)**

*...Everything exposed by the light becomes visible,<sup>14</sup> for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,*

*"Sleeper, awake!*

*Rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you." Ephesians 5: 13b-14*

Ever faithful God, who you are teacher and wisdom, we draw near you again on this our Lenten journey. It is a season for truth telling, for repentance and forgiveness and for learning to live in new ways...the Way of your Kin, all of Creation.

As those who share this beautiful land of Treaty \_\_\_\_\_, we continue to learn what it means to be treaty people. We pray this week for all of us as we learn the truth of past generations' wisdom and past generations' sins. May we work diligently to live into reconciling relationships with the First Nations peoples with whom we share this land.

**(May be used during LENT 5 (March 27 – April 2) if part of a series of Lenten services)**

*When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.<sup>34</sup> He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”<sup>35</sup> Jesus began to weep.<sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” John 11: 32-36*

Oh, Lord, how would so many lives be different if only your church had shared and proclaimed your way of love and wholeness, your Creation’s beautiful diversity and your deep compassion to all people [as a church], and not only some people. Forgive us for not recognizing that the world, and each person, is a precious jewel in your sight, with many facets and colours. Forgive us for not noticing how your light is reflected in the diversity of creation. Our neglect has had tragic results. So many have been bound in gravecloths. You have wept at too many funerals. You have seen countless families torn apart due to fear and hate. Forgive us when we focus on differences instead of on what our faith teaches: that You created all things, and proclaim they are good! [ That means all people]. You command us to love you and all others, even those who are different from whatever we consider the norm. For you, the only norm is Love. God we pray today, in particular, for all who because of their sexual identity and orientation are persecuted in blatant and subtle ways. May we change our living into courage...living outside the closets and prisons of fear, calling out discrimination as hate and living into love actions each day.

**(If doing a series of Lenten services this prayer may be used for Lent 6 (March 3-8) *Sunday March 9 is Palm and Passion Sunday, and the formal ending of the season of Lent. You can also use it to note that it was children in the street who threw a party for Jesus.***

*Do you know what I have done to you?<sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. John 13: 12b-15*

Sustaining God: we have experienced together a Lenten journey from the wilderness, to fountains of wisdom and valleys of repentance. Help us now take our final steps with Jesus,

to Jerusalem in parade,

to an upper room in peril

and into the Garden in prayer.

We do so following the ones Jesus called us to follow: the children. May we live and share our resources in such a way that no child go hungry in our town. May your courage reach all those

children who are growing up in poverty, remind them of their worth in your eyes and help us see them in that way. May we serve one another, especially the least among us, as good servants – those who love and follow the Great Teacher, Jesus, the Christ. Amen