

# New heavens and a new earth;

## INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Our planning team gathered the day that Barak Obama was inaugurated as President of the United States. More than a year later, the changes anticipated that day (either with optimism or dread) haven't panned out exactly the way anyone thought they would. But both on that day and in the months since then, we've been struck by the world-wide hope that new governments could usher in longed-for changes.

As Christians, we recognize the longing for renewal, but know to look somewhere other than politics for its fulfillment: what we ache for is more comprehensive than any world leader can expect to deliver. The prophet Isaiah gives words to our yearning by painting a picture of reform so wide-ranging that everything in the created order is included. God is not content to stop on the human plane with government reforms, but goes on to erase the enmity between predator and prey and even to renew the very ground of life as we know it.

In these worship resources, the Isaiah text that opens Easter Sunday sets the tone for the whole season and invites us to keep our eyes peeled for the new things God is doing. The weekly gospel and Acts readings then challenge us to join in this cosmic renewal project. But change doesn't come easily. Like the first disciples and the early church, we struggle to move beyond our comfort zones—in our vocations, our attitudes, our economy, our hospitality. We might secretly prefer a resuscitated life, a restoration of the way things used to be. Instead, God brings resurrection: something radically new.

When we picked our theme from Easter Sunday's Isaiah text, we noted the significance of ending with a semi-colon rather than a period: this new heaven and new earth is still in the making, and we too are invited

to join in its re-creation. The weekly titles name the "new" we saw each week—new voice, new peace, new way of seeing, etc. If the punctuation we used looks too goofy to you, leave it off, but find some way to incorporate this season's invitation to act and pray in ways that support God's kingdom coming here and now, on earth as in heaven.

## SUGGESTED ORDER OF WORSHIP

Our imaginations were captured by the wide scope of God's resurrection activity not only in the past but on into the present. So the focus of our worship resources includes both biblical and contemporary examples, stories from our own experience and from around the world. Jesus' resurrection inaugurates a whole new way of being! Our suggested order of worship is the standard *gathering, praising, listening, responding*, but we've tried to include many ways for congregations to hear and join what God is doing through song, storytelling, and ritual action throughout the whole service. Several response suggestions are given each Sunday. Choose one or more, but don't feel the need to use them all.

You'll note that the international resurrection story comes in the gathering section of the service: each week we want to be sure to proclaim the difference the resurrection is still making in our world. The resurrection stories are all drawn from the work of Mennonite Central Committee and Ten Thousand Villages, and represent concrete ways that the new heavens and new earth are breaking into the lives of some of "the least" around the world. The offering, rather than being a response to the sermon, comes as an act of praise early in the service.

Between the scriptures, the stories of our brothers and sisters around the world, and our own stories, there's a lot of talking going on. We suggest that if you have space, your bulletin or newsletter might be a good place to print the information about the bird ornaments so that the morning doesn't become too word-heavy. You can find this information at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org).

## VISUALS

Full directions for visuals can be found at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org)

### *Banner*

Our banner proclaims Isaiah's message of new creating and our theme for the season "New heavens and a new earth." Lettering is in the calligraphic style of our hymnal and supplements to promote identification with our denomination—one small step in moving beyond our congregational or national boundaries. Banner fabric should be sheer and of a neutral, white, or foggy color, blurring the distinction between heaven and earth.

### *Table*

The table in front of the banner should be covered in the same kind of fabric as is used in the banner. A simple globe vase filled with gypsophila (commonly known as baby's breath) represents the millions of little resurrection stories unfolding around the world. The traditional Easter lily is encumbered by unfair and unsustainable growing practices which exploit undocumented workers who are hired for brief periods of hard work and then let go. If our Easter message is to be taken seriously, these kinds of socially and environmentally unsustainable practices must go. Gypsophila is now available in a fair trade version. Additionally, its growing environment involves a more sustainable mix of other cut flowers, and provides more opportunities for full-time employment for those who grow and harvest it.

In addition to a bouquet of gypsophila, the table will hold a growing "flock" of bird ornaments. Dowel rods with a sturdy wire rings can be used as perches for the birds. Throughout history and across cultures, birds have often been sacred symbols because they travel freely between heaven and earth, and in our own Christian tradition, a bird is one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit. There is a bird from Ten Thousand Villages for each Sunday, and each bird will bring with it with it a resurrection story from an area of the world where Mennonite Central Committee or Ten Thousand Villages has a presence. Ten Thousand Villages provides

vital, fair income to Third World people by marketing their handicrafts and telling their stories in North America.

Children could be involved in setting the table either through a procession on Easter Sunday which would bring in all eight birds at once, or through a weekly procession that would bring in one new bird each Sunday until Pentecost.

A suggested resurrection story for each week can be found at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org). You can also find other stories at the links below, or, if you have congregational members who have travelled to the countries represented by the birds, you could ask them to tell stories about their own experiences or those of people they know.

[www.peace.mennolink.org/fun.html](http://www.peace.mennolink.org/fun.html)

[www.peace.mennolink.org/drumming/index.html](http://www.peace.mennolink.org/drumming/index.html)

[www.mcc.org/globalfamily/](http://www.mcc.org/globalfamily/)

[www.mcc.org/globalfamily/stories/southafrica/index.html](http://www.mcc.org/globalfamily/stories/southafrica/index.html)

[www.tenthousandvillages.com/php/fair.trade/fair.trade.artisan.php](http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/php/fair.trade/fair.trade.artisan.php)

## THEME SONG

"New earth, heavens new" (HWB 299) beautifully captures the spirit of this season. A simple song, it can benefit from the addition of instruments and harmonies. Easter to Pentecost is a long season, so though we've included the theme song as a reminder each Sunday, it's unlikely you'll want to sing it 8 times in a row. Consider alternating singing and instrumental versions Sunday by Sunday, and don't sing all the verses all at once. Or maybe you want to kick off and end the season with this song, inserting it in worship a time or two in between.

## CHILDREN'S TIMES

Each Sunday, the leader will tell the children the Acts story for that day, emphasizing the role the Holy Spirit played in Peter and Paul's equipping to deliver the gospel. Puppets, wooden figurines, pictures or flannel graphs could be used if you wish, but it's also just fine to simply tell the story.

## PEACE CANDLE AND PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Before the prayers of the people, light a candle for peace

each Sunday as you mention that the peace candle is a sign of our faith in the way of Jesus whose “light shines in the darkness” (John 1:5) and whose first words to his friends after his resurrection were words of peace (John 20:19). Choose a candle color that symbolizes peace and hope, like sky-blue or spring-green. This season of hope prompts us to pray and to act for peace in both personal and global ways.

After the lighting of the candle, invite the congregation to share their joys and concerns in specific ways, giving thanks where hope abounds or joining our prayers to those whose struggle continues:

- praying for our world (global and national areas where violence, poverty, injustice, oppression exist, but also where peace and new life are being found)
- praying for our community (state, province, city, conference, sister churches, etc., remembering the homeless, the jobless, the struggles of our particular community, and also where God’s love and grace are springing forth, i.e. volunteers, food banks, the work of local congregations, etc.)
- praying for ourselves (giving thanks and remembering the needs of our congregation and loved ones)

## AFFIRMING OUR FAITH

Invite the congregation to affirm their Easter faith by using one of the wonderful written resources in the hymnal or the supplements. These include:

HWB: 710, 711, 713, 716, 717, 721

STJ: 133, 134, 135, 168, 177

STS: 178, 179, 181, 203, 144, 149

## PASSING THE PEACE

Each Sunday, encourage worshippers to share a word of peace with each other. Consider introducing the passing of the peace in this way: “The first words from the lips of the resurrected Jesus to the women and men who were his friends were words of deep comfort, grace, and love: ‘Peace be with you.’ In a world where peace is sometimes in short supply, it would be reassuring to hear those words more often and see them in action. So let’s stand and greet those around us with the same blessing that Jesus used: ‘Peace be with you.’”

## SHARING OUR STORIES

Several weeks in advance, invite people to prepare and share brief stories of new life and hope. Stories from persons serving with Mennonite Central Committee,

Mennonite Economic Development, Mennonite Disaster Services, Ten Thousand Villages, etc. are engaging and put faces to the work being done. You could also invite a local representative from the food bank, homeless shelter, rape crisis center, hospice, mental health facility, etc. to share ways that God’s light and love shine in unexpected and surprising ways. Choose stories and testimonies that highlight the specific focus for each week. Keep the stories brief and follow them with a congregational response of a hymn or an affirmation of faith.

## CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT WORSHIP

- Although these materials suggest an order of service, you should feel free to adapt the elements offered to suit your own worship context and tradition.
- Explore the theme suggested by the music recommendations. *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (HWB) and its supplements, *Sing the Journey* (SJ) and *Sing the Story* (SS), are great resources and we recommend trying them, but not all congregations will find them useful. If yours doesn’t, look up the suggested songs, consider their lyrical and musical theme, and then pick music from your resources that goes in the same congregation.
- Draw on the gifts and abilities within your congregation. If you know a songwriter who has composed a song that really connects with your congregation’s experience, by all means use it. If someone in your congregation knows a great children’s story that fits the theme, leave our recommendation aside and go with that. If somebody has a great idea for a visual worship focus that looks nothing like our suggestion and still expresses the theme, scrap our suggestion. If the sermon is faithful and discerning and nothing like our suggested sermon starter, that’s fine.
- We hope, above all else, that our ideas can supplement and enhance the energy and creativity of your congregation, not replace or suppress them.

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*Southeast Conference writing team: Jewel Shenk, Irene Shearer, Randall Spaulding, Eugene Stutzman, and others.*

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## *New heavens and a new earth;*

**Texts:** Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43 or I Corinthians 15:19-26; John 20:1-18a

**Focus statement:**

Grieving all that has gone wrong, we meet Jesus, who sends us out to tell the deeper truth of God's plan to make all things new. Like Mary, we speak in a new voice, recounting the stories of resurrection we see around us.

**Song suggestions:**

On Easter Sunday, it is a tradition in some cultures to “resurrect” the Alleluias that have been “buried” during the season of Lent. Anytime the word “Alleluia” is sung during the entire service, the congregation is invited to respond by making a joyful noise: striking chimes, cymbals, percussion instruments or bells that may be passed around before worship begins. Or invite people to shake key chains or mint tins or whatever they have available!

HWB 278 *Christ is alive! Let Christians sing*

HWB 267 *Christ has arisen*

HWB 280 *Christ the Lord is risen today*

HWB 264 *Come, ye faithful, raise the strain*

HWB 265 *Come, ye faithful, raise the strain*

HWB 26 *Jesus, stand among us*

HWB 266 *They crucified my savior*

HWB 642 *This is the day the Lord hath made*

HWB 408 *O day of peace*

HWB 43 *Christ is our cornerstone*

STJ 113 *For mornings bright*

STJ 19 *I will call upon the Lord*

STJ 18 *Over my head*

STS 87 *Alleluia*

STS 17 *Alleluia!*

STS 24 *Alleluia*

STS 88 *That Easter morn at break of day*

STS 90 *O qué bueno es Jesús*

STS 89 *Christ is alive*

## GATHERING

**Call to Worship:**

Leader: Early on Sunday morning,  
the stone, by miracle of movement,  
spoke without words—

People: **“Christ is alive!”**

Leader: Early on Sunday morning,  
Mary spoke with a new voice—“Teacher!”

People: **Christ is alive!**

**Theme song:**

HWB 299 *New earth, heavens new*

**Procession of the birds and resurrection story**

**Opening Prayer**

## PRAISING

### *Hymns and songs of praise*

#### *Children's time:* Acts 10:34-46

Here's an amazing thing: the risen Jesus is for *everyone* who believes. Before this, devout Jews were not allowed to associate or visit with a Gentiles, or non-Jews. But the Holy Spirit gave Peter a different message (Acts 10:9-33)—God doesn't want differences to divide his children. The Spirit helped Peter see that God had something new in mind, and he wasn't shy about telling people about it. Who are some people who seem to different to you to get along with? How might God be inviting you to become their friends?

#### *Offering:*

Resurrecting God,  
we catch sight of you in the stories of your people.  
Like them, make us bold to speak with a new voice,  
even in our giving. Amen.

## HEARING

#### *Scripture reading:* John 20:1-18

This is a lovely passage but also one that's very well-known to long-time church attenders. To help them listen anew, consider reading it reader's theater style (narrator, Mary Magdalene, two angels, and Jesus), or asking someone to learn it by heart and present it to the congregation from memory.

#### *Sermon notes:*

Easter Sunday is a time of joyful celebration, but at the first Easter and in our own lives, this celebration grows out very real grief and fear. In today's texts, we're aware of the movement from one extreme to another: from death to life, from cross to empty tomb, from uncertainty to certainty, from darkness to light, from old to new, from the grave to resurrection. Christ is alive! And we may have some catching up to do.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus reveals himself to Mary who quickly takes the word of his resurrection to the disciples. Are we like Mary or the disciples? What do we feel and see... or perhaps not notice? We have been trusted with the announcements of the resurrection. How are we sharing the good news? How might we, like Mary, proclaim "I have seen the Lord?"

In preparing for today's sermon, note the many contrasts which include waiting and running, the expected and the unexpected, questions and answers, doubting and believing, lack of understanding and recognition.

## RESPONDING

### *Song*

### *Affirmation of faith*

#### *Sharing our stories:*

Invite several people to share brief stories of times they've "seen the Lord." What have they witnessed? What good news do they have to share with others? In order to hear from more than one person, ask people to prepare testimonies of 100 words or fewer—to confine themselves to the vivid core of what they have to say.

### *Peace candle and prayers of the people*

### *Passing the peace*

## SENDING

### *Benediction*

Go forth in newness of life,  
filled with Christ's message,  
renewed in your hope.

Through your new voice,  
God can work miracles.

### *Sending song*

Easter 2 A new peace: April 11, 2010

## *New heavens and a new earth;*



*Texts:* Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

### *Focus statement:*

In the fears and doubts that keep us locked up behind closed doors, Jesus comes to give us a new peace and sends us out as he has been sent.

### *Song suggestions:*

HWB 262 *At the Lamb's high feast we sing*

HWB 56 *Awake, arise, O sing a new song*

HWB 292 *Away with our fears*

HWB 37 *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

HWB 24 *Grace to you and peace*

HWB 276 *This joyful Eastertide*

HWB 295 *Christ is coming! Let creation*

HWB 570 *We walk by faith and not by sight*

STJ 97 *The Lord is my light*

STJ 9 *Come, now is the time to worship*

STJ 74 *Now go in peace*

STS 113 *I will stand in the congregation*

STS 108 *View the present*

STS 101 *The risen Christ*

STS 109 *Blessing and honor*

## GATHERING

### *Call to Worship:*

Leader: Amidst our doubts and fears, Jesus says,

People: **“Peace be with you.”**

Leader: In our turmoil and distress, Jesus says,

People: **“Peace be with you.”**

Leader: God has breathed the Holy Spirit on us.

People: **We will not doubt, but believe.**

*Theme song:*

HWB 299 *New earth, heavens new*

*Procession of the birds and resurrection story*

*Opening prayer*

## PRAISING

*Hymns and songs of praise*

*Children's time:* Acts 5:27-32

When God's Spirit gets hold of people, things happen! This story tells of an amazing change: the disciples who were hiding behind locked doors are now going public. Though the authorities are trying to hush them up, Peter and the other apostles are clear: they must obey God rather than human big shots. Like it did for them, the Holy Spirit can give us the courage to tell the stories of Jesus and to act like Jesus did.

*Offering:*

God of abundance,  
your wholeness surrounds us,  
your grace sustains us.  
In giving our gifts,  
may we share your peace with others. Amen.

## HEARING

*Scripture reading:* John 20:19-31

Consider asking a scientist or researcher in your congregation to read this passage, someone whose job it is to *prove* that something is true or correct. Through the years, Thomas has taken some flak for doubting, but his need to know doesn't seem to bother Jesus.

*Sermon notes:*

What an emotional roller coaster this week has been for Jesus' followers! The joy and celebration of the resurrection have faded; the disciples continue meeting together, though out of fear they barricade themselves behind locked doors. But no barrier can stop Jesus: he appears to his followers and breathes his peace on them. This changes everything. The doubter, Thomas, declares, "My Lord and my God."

Perhaps today we are not so different from them. We too experience fear and uncertainty, and Jesus continues to send us out to live and share the good news of forgiveness. When we feel inadequate to the task, Jesus' Spirit strengthens, encourages and empowers us just as it did those first disciples.

## RESPONDING

*Song*

*Affirmation of faith*

*Sharing our stories:*

Invite a person several weeks in advance to tell a brief story about being afraid or experiencing anxiety, and of how they have found help. End with a prayer for all who suffer from anxiety, fear, and depression.

*or*

Invite a person to share openly about dealing with doubt in their faith journey. Unlike what some Christians believe, doubt is not a bad thing to be jettisoned at the first possible moment, but a useful tool in growing and maturing in faith. A person who doubts is not to be shamed or condemned. End with a prayer which welcomes and accepts the doubting and unsure, and seeks the God whose love and grace is big enough to handle anyone's questions and struggles.

*Peace candle and prayers of the people*

*Passing the peace*

**SENDING**

*Benediction*

As you go forward, look up.  
As you go forward, look out.  
As you go forward, share Christ's peace  
in a world in need of wholeness.

*Sending song*

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**Easter 3** A new way of seeing: April 18, 2010

*New heavens and a new earth;*



*Texts:* Acts 9:1-6 ; Acts 9:7-20; Psalm 30; Revelations 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

*Focus statement:*

Clutching our cherished certainties, we're confronted with an enlarged vision of what God is up to. Like Saul, we surrender what we thought was true and give ourselves to a new way of seeing: the big picture of God's action.

*Song suggestions:*

HWB 26 <i>Holy Spirit, come with power</i>	STJ 112 <i>I owe the Lord a morning song</i>
HWB 108 <i>Blessing and honor and glory</i>	STJ 113 <i>For mornings bright</i>
HWB 216 <i>Christ, whose glory fills the skies</i>	STJ 3 <i>Jesus calls us here to meet him</i>
HWB 277 <i>I know that my Redeemer lives</i>	STJ 104 <i>God moves in a mysterious way</i>
HWB 279 <i>I know that my Redeemer lives</i>	STS 40 <i>We will follow</i>
HWB 592 <i>Love divine, all loves excelling</i>	STS 109 <i>Blessing and honor</i>
HWB 59 <i>Sing praise to God who reigns above</i>	STS 110 <i>Alleluia! Gracious Jesus!</i>
HWB 456 <i>Shepherd of souls, refresh and bless</i>	STS 34 <i>You are holy</i>



## GATHERING

### *Call to Worship:*

Leader: From darkness to light,  
from weeping in the night to joy in the morning,

**People: we rejoice in you, O Christ!**

Leader: From unbelief to belief,  
from poor vision to a more perfect sight,

**People: we rejoice in you, O Christ!**

Leader: From clouded minds to clear thinking,  
from pride to humility,

**People: we rejoice in you, O Christ!**

### *Theme song:*

HWB 299 *New earth, heavens new*

### *Procession of the birds and resurrection story*

### *Opening prayer*

## PRAISING

### *Hymns and songs of praise*

### *Children's time:* Acts 9:1-20

On the road to Damascus, God did what it took to get Saul's attention. When the Spirit gave him back his sight, it helped him see that "being religious" was less important than following Jesus. In a funny way, when Saul was trying to do it all right, he was getting it all wrong! Just like with Saul, the Holy Spirit wants to take away anything that keep us from seeing Jesus and being like him to the world. Who or what helps you see the way God does?

### *Offering:*

Clear-eyed God,  
you give us both new vision and opportunities to use it.  
May this offering share  
the love which you have made known to us. Amen.

## HEARING

### *Scripture reading:*

Ken Medema has written a story song based on this text—perhaps someone in your congregation would be willing to sing the scripture this morning! See [www.kenmedema.com/store/Scripts/prodList.asp?strSearch=sittin%27+by+the+window&strSearchMin=0&strSearchMax=0&strSearchCat=0&curPage=3&sortField=description](http://www.kenmedema.com/store/Scripts/prodList.asp?strSearch=sittin%27+by+the+window&strSearchMin=0&strSearchMax=0&strSearchCat=0&curPage=3&sortField=description) to order the sheet music.

### *Sermon notes:*

Where are we, like Saul, blinded by tradition or habit? In what ways is God trying to get our attention? We need to be open and ready for new and surprising tasks. Then, like Ananias, we will be willing to say, "Here I am, Lord." This doesn't mean that we won't question the task, but our reservations won't prevent us from

stepping out in faith to share the love of Jesus. As you prepare your sermon, focus on a social issue that has particular significance in your community, and the ways God may be inviting your congregation to step out in faith to respond to it.

## RESPONDING

### *Song*

### *Affirmation of faith*

### *Sharing our stories:*

Invite an older person to talk about how he or she has moved from a narrow understanding of faith to a broader one. Invite them to share how they have changed over the decades and how they are continuing to see God's love and purpose for the world in new ways.

### *Sharing food: a "first breakfast" celebration*

The gospel passage is filled with references to the ritual of eating together and remembering the life of Jesus. Serve a "communion" meal of fish and bread. In the season of Eastertide, the season of new life, Jesus makes the Last Supper new by inviting his friends to eat the First Breakfast. Prepare small portions of smoked fish, or serve smoked salmon with a little sour cream and dill. Accompany the fish with flat bread or pita. Use the traditional words of communion, or adapt this ritual to include all members of the congregation, whether baptized or not, blessing the meal and calling everyone to "Come and have breakfast!" Invite people to come forward in groups to eat. Then send them out encouraging them to feed others, both literally and with the good news of love, peace, and kindness.

### *Peace candle and prayers of the people*

### *Passing the peace*

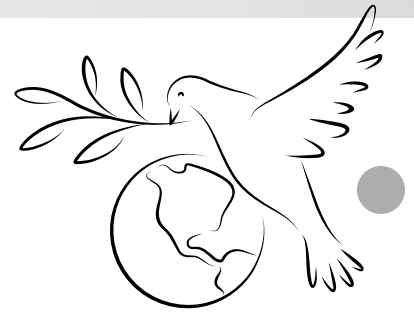
## SENDING

### *Benediction*

Just as Saul gained new sight,  
go into the world with a new way of seeing,  
and eager to testify to what you have seen and heard.

### *Sending song*

Easter 4 New compassion: April 25, 2010



## *New heavens and a new earth;*

**Texts:** Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelations 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

**Focus statement:**

From the limitations of our self-centered concerns, the Spirit invites us into an enlarged compassion. Our task is to embody God's care for the world.

**Song suggestions:**

HWB 102 <i>To God be the glory</i>	STJ 12	<i>Cantai ao Senhor</i>
HWB 118 <i>Praise God, from whom all blessings flow</i>	STJ 29	<i>You are all we have</i>
HWB 352 <i>Gentle Shepherd</i>	STJ 53	<i>O God in heaven</i>
HWB 332 <i>Blessed assurance</i>	STJ 61	<i>How can we be silent</i>
HWB 439 <i>I want Jesus to walk with me</i>	STS 99	<i>The Lord's my shepherd</i>
HWB 604 <i>Jesus, joy of man's desiring</i>	STS 93	<i>Alleluia! Give the glory</i>
HWB 498 <i>He comes to us as one unknown</i>	STS 91	<i>Star of the morning</i>
HWB 296 <i>Here from all nations, all tongues</i>	STS 75	<i>Heri ni jina</i>
HWB 495 <i>O let all who thirst</i>		

## GATHERING

**Call to Worship:**

- Leader: Learning from Jesus a new compassion,  
we look beyond our narrow margins.
- People: **In the green pastures of God's plenty  
there is plenty for those in need.**
- Leader: Near the still waters of God's peace,  
we reach out to wipe away the tears of mourners.
- People: **Sustained by God's grace,  
we share what we have received.**

**Theme song:**

HWB 299 *New earth, heavens new*

**Procession of the birds and resurrection story**

**Opening prayer**

## PRAISING

**Hymns and songs of praise**

**Children's time:** Acts 9:36-43

Peter is a follower of Jesus, and, like Jesus, an important part of his ministry is healing. When he hears of the death of Tabitha, an apostle who cared for those most in need, he goes to her bedside. Through him,

the Spirit restores Tabitha back to life. How happy the widows were! They desperately needed someone like Tabitha who cared for “the least.” Who are some of “the least” in your church or town? How could we listen to the Holy Spirit like Tabitha did and do our part to help them?

***Offering:***

Loving God,  
we learn compassion from you.  
Bless and multiply these gifts  
so that they might spread your love to others. Amen.

## HEARING

***Scripture reading:*** Acts 9:36-43

Invite either one of “the least” or someone who works with the marginalized people in your community to read this story. How might hearing this story in their voice color the congregation’s listening?

***Sermon notes:***

Tabitha/Dorcas, a faithful disciple, was filled with compassion for those in need. How can we learn from her example to be released from our self-centered concerns to reach out to “the least”? And who are today’s “least”? Probably the uninsured, the undocumented, the homeless, the addicts, the unwed mothers, those on welfare—all those who have trouble “making it” in our system. We are invited by the Spirit to exercise a new compassion and join Jesus’ work of caring for others. Today’s sermon could call the congregation to imagine and commit to a lifestyle of advocacy for and service to the least. For some great stories of service to and with the poor, check out Shane Claiborne’s *The irresistible revolution or Jesus for president*.

## RESPONDING

***Song***

***Affirmation of faith***

***Water and anointing:***

Invite the congregation to come forward to receive a cool cup of water, guided by the love of the Shepherd who offers us the water of life (Rev 7:17). Have elders or youth serve the water. Along with offering people a drink, provide a quiet space set aside for those who wish to be anointed with oil (Ps 23:5). Musicians can lead the congregation in HWB 495 “O let all who thirst” or STJ 29 “You are all we have.”

*or*

Invite someone who has knowledge about the water crisis in the world to come and share about ways MCC or others are making clean, drinking water available to those who need it. We may take clean and plentiful water for granted, but for many it’s in short supply.

***Peace candle and prayers of the people***

***Passing the peace***

## SENDING

***Benediction***

God’s love can be made visible,  
one step at a time.

As you go from this place of worship,  
may your life speak God's boundless care for all.

*Sending song*

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Easter 5 A new commandment: May 2, 2010

## *New heavens and a new earth;*



*Texts:* Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelations 21:1-6, John 13:31-35

*Focus statement:*

From a love reserved for those close to us, the Spirit calls us to love both friends and enemies in ways we never dreamed possible. There is only one commandment: to love like Jesus loves.

*Song suggestions:*

HWB 48	<i>All creatures of our God and king</i>	STJ 31	<i>He came down</i>
HWB 12	<i>Come, let us all unite to sing</i>	STJ 51	<i>As tranquil streams</i>
HWB 54	<i>Praise the Lord who reigns above</i>	STJ 39	<i>Ubi caritas et amor</i>
HWB 106, 285	<i>All hail the power of Jesus' name</i>	STJ 72	<i>One is the body</i>
HWB 325	<i>Creating God, your fingers trace</i>	STS 79	<i>Holy Spirit, come to us</i>
HWB 306	<i>In Christ there is no East or West</i>	STS 18	<i>Erfreue dich (Be joyful)</i>
HWB 319	<i>Jesus shall reign</i>	STS 115	<i>Beauty for brokenness</i>
HWB 452	<i>Ubi caritas et amor</i>	STS 117	<i>How can I say</i>
STJ 44	<i>The love of God</i>	STS 121	<i>Nothing is lost on the breath of God</i>

## GATHERING

*Call to Worship:*

Leader: Jesus gave a new command: to love as he loved.  
**People: Looking beyond ourselves, this is how to love.**  
Leader: Thinking first of others, this is how to love.  
**People: Pushing aside convenience, this is how to love.**  
Leader: Giving even when it hurts, this is how to love.  
**People: By following Jesus, we share his love.**

*Theme song:*

HWB 299 *New earth, heavens new*

*Procession of the birds and resurrection story*

*Opening prayer*

## PRAISING

### *Hymns and songs of praise*

#### *Children's time:* Acts 11:1-18

One time when Peter was having a midday rest, God gave him a picture of something he'd never imagined: the very people he'd been taught to avoid were the people God was sending him to. The rest of the believers weren't so sure, but Peter knew what he'd seen. With some help from the children, use a sheet and some stuffed animals to re-enact Peter's vision. This would be a good Sunday to talk with the children about the way the Holy Spirit can give us good ideas about who to love and how to love them. If God were showing us a sheet today, who or what might be in it?

#### *Offering:*

Gracious God,  
in response to your boundary-breaking love  
we give both our gifts and ourselves to you.  
Use them so that your will might be done,  
here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

## HEARING

#### *Scripture reading:* Acts 11:1-18 and John 13:31-35

The Acts passage would work well as a reader's theater (narrator, Peter, circumcised believers). The gospel passage is brief and could be presented especially effectively by being recited from memory. This new commandment sounds different when it is spoken *to us* rather than read as a report of something long past.

#### *Sermon notes:*

Though Jesus doesn't put it into words, the "old commandment" is probably to love the loveable, those who are easy and rewarding to love. The new commandment enlarges the scope, to those within the community who aren't so easy to love. Then the Acts passage show us we can't stop there. Who are the "unclean" that the Spirit wants us to accept? Alcoholics? Drug addicts? Unwed pregnant teens? Homosexuals? Illegal immigrants? Enemies of the USA and Canada? To love as Jesus loves means to love both friends and enemies unconditionally. God's love is not reserved for only those who "have their act together." Yet we also have to ask about the nature of "the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). What Peter was talking about took the believers at Jerusalem beyond their comfort zone, but it wasn't a gospel of anything goes. What does it mean, in practice, to love?

An example of someone who listened to God's call to offer help to someone he was supposed to hate is Dirk Willems. If you go to [www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/295](http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/295) you can download a pdf to create a little illustrated book of the story of Dirk Willems to hand out to the children during the sermon.

## RESPONDING

### *Song*

### *Affirmation of faith*

### *Sharing our stories:*

This would be a good week to hear from someone who's been called to costly love. Where has that love taken them? What have they struggled with? How are they seeing God's face in unexpected people?

### *Peace candle and prayers of the people*

*Passing the peace*

## SENDING

### *Benediction*

Just as Jesus has loved you,  
love one another.  
But don't stop there.  
Love also beyond the boundaries,  
and watch for miracles to burst forth around you.

### *Sending song*

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Easter 6 New followers: May 9, 2010

## *New heavens and a new earth;*



*Texts:* Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29

### *Focus statement:*

From a focus on our tribe and nation, Jesus calls us to become companions to unexpected new followers. We enlarge our understanding of what it means to be part of the family of faith.

### *Song suggestions:*

HWB 356 <i>Breathe on me, Breath of God</i>	STJ 105 <i>Don't be afraid</i>
HWB 15 <i>O Prince of Peace</i>	STJ 98 <i>All will be well</i>
HWB 298 <i>Veni Sancte Spiritus</i>	STJ 69 <i>Cuando el pobre</i>
HWB 367 <i>For the healing of the nations</i>	STJ 100 <i>Here I am</i>
HWB 619 <i>Glorious things of thee are spoken</i>	STS 72 <i>We are often tossed and driv'n</i>
HWB 615 <i>Shall we gather at the river</i>	STS 111 <i>For me to live is Christ</i>
HWB 427 <i>You shall go out with joy</i>	STS 16 <i>Peace before us</i>
HWB 615 <i>Shall we gather at the river</i>	STS 57 <i>Go, my friends, in grace</i>
STJ 97 <i>The Lord is my light</i>	

## GATHERING

### *Call to Worship:*

Leader: Because God has shown kindness and blessing,  
**People: all lands know God's power to save.**  
Leader: So let all the people praise you, O God;  
**People: let all the people praise you.**

Leader: You are the one who dispenses true justice;

People: **you guide all the nations of the earth.**

*Theme song:*

HWB 299 *New earth, heavens new*

*Procession of the birds and resurrection story*

*Opening prayer*

## PRAISING

*Hymns and songs of praise*

*Children's time:* Acts 16:9-15

Through a vision, the Holy Spirit carefully directed Paul to a place where people were eager to hear about Jesus. And the Holy Spirit is not done with this kind of work! Ask a pastor, missionary, or someone who has felt and obeyed the call of God to briefly share their story with the children.

*Offering:*

God of cities and riverbanks,  
your love overflows every boundary we can imagine.

Bless these gifts, and through them  
enlarge our generosity to match your own. Amen.

## HEARING

*Scripture reading:* Acts 16:9-15

It's hard for us to understand how incredibly radical God's extension of the good news beyond the people of Israel must have felt in the early church. Ask a newcomer to the faith to read today's scripture.

*Sermon notes:*

Our concern cannot be for our family alone ("Me and my wife, my son John and his wife, we four and no more"). In spite of our habits or inclinations to the contrary, Jesus welcomes all willing people into his family. Where is our "Macedonia"? Tell some stories of responding to God's leading to lay aside prejudices about who's in and who's out. Who are some new followers you've met? How is God inviting both of you to grow through your relationship with each other?

## RESPONDING

*Song*

*Affirmation of faith*

*Sharing our stories:*

Especially if the preacher tells some stories about being led toward new and unexpected believers, invite members of the congregation to add their witness to the Spirit's prodding to move outside of the traditional "family of faith."

*Peace candle and prayers of the people*

*Passing the peace*



## SENDING

### *Benediction*

Jesus has left his peace with us.  
So do not be afraid.  
Open your eyes: the Spirit is bringing new followers  
to be your companions.

### *Sending song*

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Easter 7 New boldness: May 15, 2010

## *New heavens and a new earth;*



*Texts:* Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20-21; John 17:20-26

### *Focus statement:*

Enmeshed in unfair economies built on scarcity, we're called to speak the truth of God's abundance for all. Like Paul and Silas, we live in new boldness that liberates both oppressor and oppressed.

### *Song suggestions:*

HWB 69	<i>The Lord is king</i>	STS 1	<i>Praise the One who breaks the darkness</i>
HWB 509	<i>The Tree of Life my soul hath seen</i>	STJ 52	<i>Jesus, help us live in peace</i>
HWB 495	<i>O let all who thirst</i>	STJ 124	<i>My soul cries out</i>
HWB 214	<i>Morning star, O cheering sight</i>	STJ 72	<i>One is the body</i>
HWB 611	<i>Soon and very soon</i>	STS 119	<i>We believe, as one by one</i>
HWB 493	<i>I heard the voice of Jesus say</i>	STS 100	<i>O blessed spring</i>
HWB 436	<i>All who believe and are baptized</i>	STS 64	<i>There is a well</i>
STJ 82	<i>Water has held us</i>		

## GATHERING

### *Call to Worship:*

Leader: As Paul and Silas were bold in prayer and praise,  
**People: so the Spirit also leads us into new boldness.**  
Leader: God draws our attention to those in distress,  
**People: filling us with audacity and compassion.**  
Leader: In the face of difficulty,  
**People: Jesus grants us the courage to walk a new path.**

### *Theme song:*

HWB 299 *New earth, heavens new*

## *Procession of the birds and resurrection story*

### *Opening prayer*

## **PRAISING**

### *Hymns and songs of praise*

#### *Children's time:* Acts 16:16-34

The Holy Spirit gave Paul and Silas great boldness. Instead looking out only for themselves, they acted in ways that helped others: first by making the slave girl well, which got them thrown in jail; and then by staying put when the earthquake shook their jail door open so the jailer wouldn't get in trouble. Sometime other people need our help, even if it makes things more difficult for us, and the Holy Spirit can give us the courage to do what we can to make a situation better for someone else. Think with the children about someone in their neighborhood, daycare or school that the other kids pick on or leave out. What could they do or say to show God's love and help that person out? After brainstorming some ideas, consider role-playing them with the children, or asking some youth or adults to act them out.

#### *Offering:*

God of every good gift,  
we lean on you for sustenance  
even as we share our gifts with others.  
Bless this offering and multiply it for your glory. Amen

## **HEARING**

#### *Scripture reading:* Acts 16:16-34

This story lends itself especially well to a scripture-based drama. You can find a light-hearted script at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org) that can include a flexible number of people with a range of dramatic talents. It will probably take some practice, though, so if this is the route you go, plan to gather the group of scripture presenters at least once for a run-through.

#### *Sermon notes:*

Paul and Silas spoke and acted boldly, with a clear conviction about what mattered most—God's way of abundance for all rather than profit and plenty for a few. Given the economic downturn of the last year, we can perhaps feel some sympathy for the slave-owner who saw his profitable business reduced to ruins by Paul's words and actions. Yet the call to look beyond ourselves, and especially to become advocates for those at the margins of society, is just as important now as it was then. This would be a good Sunday to ponder our own enmeshment in economies of scarcity, and to hear a strong invitation to loosen our grasp on what we have so that all may have enough. What shifts in attitude and action might God's "new heaven and new earth" call forth from us in terms of our buying, saving, investing, and spending?

## **RESPONDING**

### *Song*

### *Affirmation of faith*

#### *Sharing our stories:*

Invite someone to share about how speaking out boldly for the marginalized or those being treated unfairly resulted in a change for the better—perhaps someone from the local homeless coalition or voter registration board. Or perhaps a mental health counselor could share about the ways persons with mental disabilities

have become better understood and more accepted. The main thing is to keep stories concrete and not too dramatic, so that congregational members might feel energized to take their part rather than come away with a sense that it's too big for them or it's all been done already.

### *Peace candle and prayers of the people*

### *Passing the peace*

## SENDING

### *Benediction*

Speak and act boldly,  
as one body united through the Holy Spirit,  
so that the world might know God's loving justice.

### *Sending song*

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Pentecost New community: May 23, 2010

## *New heavens and a new earth;*



*Texts:* Acts 2:1-21 or Genesis 11:1-9; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17 (25-27)

### *Focus statement:*

Not constrained by culture, race, or language, the spirit is poured out on young and old, men and women. Like those gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost, we're astonished to find ourselves part of a new community that includes the whole of creation.

### *Song suggestions:*

HWB 292 <i>Away with our fears</i>	STJ 34 <i>Loving Spirit</i>
HWB 289 <i>Filled with the Spirit's power</i>	STJ 35 <i>O Breath of Life</i>
HWB 26 <i>Holy Spirit, come with power</i>	STJ 62 <i>Christ's is the world</i>
HWB 29 <i>Like the murmur of the dove's song</i>	STJ 10 <i>Spirit working in creation</i>
HWB 46 <i>I sing the mighty power of God</i>	STS 3 <i>Come, light of the world</i>
HWB 34 <i>When the morning stars together</i>	STS 65 <i>Abres mis ojos</i>
HWB 349 <i>Spirit of God</i>	STS 104 <i>Come, O Spirit, come</i>
HWB 35 <i>Many and great, O God</i>	STS 103 <i>Fire of God, undying flame</i>
HWB 129 <i>Fire of God, undying flame</i>	

## GATHERING

### *Call to Worship:*

Leader: Come, Spirit of God,  
People: and pour your grace into our yearning hearts.

Leader: Come, Spirit of Truth,  
**People: and help us see each other with compassion.**  
Leader: Come, Spirit of Love,  
**People: and bind us together into one body.**  
*All: In you, may we become a new community. Amen.*

### *Procession of the birds and resurrection story*

### *Opening prayer*

## PRAISING

### *Hymns and songs of praise*

### *Children's time:* Acts 2:1-21

Before Jesus went up to into heaven, he promised his disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's power in us, making us part of God's family and helping us love others. Let's look at a flower and its seeds and see if that helps you imagine what I mean.

*(show flower)* Look at this flower. It's pretty and smells great. One day, when it dies, it will leave behind some seeds *(show seeds)*. These seeds can be planted in different parts of the world and each one can grow to be a flower just like the one it came from. Now a single flower can only be in one place, but its seeds can be planted in many places. When Jesus was on earth, he could only be in one place at a time. But through the Holy Spirit, God's power can work through us and all believers to share Jesus with people all over the world. If you want to take home a few seeds, you could plant them at your house to remind you of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### *Offering:*

God of fire and wind,  
blow away what keeps us from you  
and ignite us with your Spirit.  
May our giving not only help others  
but also be an act of worship for you. Amen.

## HEARING

### *Scripture reading:*

For resources for scripture presentation, see [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com). Look for dramatic resources for Pentecost Sunday of year C. Several are listed, but since they only allude to the story of Pentecost, make sure to read Acts 2:1-21 as well.

### *Sermon notes:*

Are we open to let the Holy Spirit leads us to a new unity, a new community of inclusiveness that encompasses not only those who call on the name of the Lord but the whole of creation? As Westerners, we're used to thinking in terms of opposites: in or out, right or wrong. The Spirit's work at the first Pentecost muddies all these careful boundaries: believers appear drunk, foreigners hear words spoken in their mother tongue, even the created order proclaims God's new way. The Acts text provides a good opportunity to talk about the importance of community to Anabaptist/Mennonites. For a brief overview of the role of community in Anabaptism, see Palmer Becker's "What is an Anabaptist Christian?" ([www.mennonitemission.net/resources/Publications/MissioDei/Downloads/MissioDei18.E.pdf](http://www.mennonitemission.net/resources/Publications/MissioDei/Downloads/MissioDei18.E.pdf)), H. S. Bender's *The Anabaptist vision*, or Arnold Snyder's *From Anabaptist Seed*.

## RESPONDING

### *Song*

### *Affirmation of faith*

#### *Celebrating the birthday of the church:*

Pentecost has sometimes been called the birthday of the church. Celebrate with some birthday cake and punch! Invite Sunday school classes or other groups within the congregation to make cakes or cupcakes (perhaps using carrot cake or healthier ingredients) and to decorate them with colorful red, gold, and yellow icing and sprinkles sometime before worship. Children and youth could then serve the congregation cake and red or orange juice. Sing songs of the Spirit while the food is being served, then raise your cups in a toast/ blessing to the Holy Spirit! You could also sing Happy Birthday to the worldwide church of which your congregation is a part.

#### *Theme song:*

HWB 299 *New earth, heavens new*

#### *Peace candle and prayers of the people*

#### *Passing the peace*

## SENDING

### *Benediction*

Go in the power of the Holy Spirit,  
the peace of God's presence.  
Go in the unity of fellowship;  
for we are one in Christ.

### *Sending song*

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Eleanor Snyder, Faith & Life Resource Director