

# AUGUST

## *Sunset & Stargazing*

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### OVERVIEW

August can be a good time for a sunset service, as the evenings start to get shorter in the sun's movement toward the Autumn equinox. Mid-August is also when the Perseid meteor shower happens, which is an excellent time to watch for shooting stars. Plan ahead by checking out when sunset happens in your area, and decide if you want to invite people to stay later into the night to also watch the stars. As you choose a location, you will want to consider the westerly horizon for viewing the setting sun, and also what sort of lights/light pollution there may be that will affect your ability to see the stars.

This worship gathering can explore Vespers (evening prayer) themes of liminal space between day and night, the daily Examen (prayer that reflects back on the day's activity and where God's presence was felt), the gifts and mystical quality of darkness and night, and/or the heavens declaring the glory of God.

See the [Introduction](#) to this series of worship services for further insights into planning an outdoor worship service.

### GATHERING & GROUNDING

Offer words of welcome, introductions and land acknowledgement.

As we gather ourselves for worship this evening, we are facing the west, the direction of the setting sun. I invite you to stand where you are, and take a deep breath, raising your arms to the heavens. Release your breath and return your arms down. Give them a little shake as you also release the tensions from the day that your body is holding. (pause)

Now raise your arms again as we greet the evening sky, the sun, moon, and stars, and the birds of the heavens. Consider the vastness of God and our universe. (pause)

Lower your arms to a horizontal position in greeting and recognition of the trees, the four-legged animals of this watershed, and the people around you. These are our co-congregants this evening, joining us in praise of our Maker. (pause)

And finally lower your arms, with your palms facing down towards the earth, and greet the plants that grow on the earth, the animals that crawl on the earth and the vast array of life below the surface of the earth. Acknowledge the groundwater and the bedrock that offers us a firm foundation, just as God is our sure foundation. (pause)

Having greeted the more-than-human world around us, we want to remember that all of this is not simply the setting we are in, but the community of creation we are gathered together with. We also name that God, the Eternal Presence, is here among us, in this place and all places, at this time and all times.

Take a moment to close your eyes and tune into your other senses – can you smell the scents of the earth? feel the breeze on your skin or the sun on your face? hear the sounds of the birds, crickets, trees? All of these senses are available to you as we pay attention to the ways that God speaks to us.

**Pray:**

You are above us, O God, you are within.  
You are in each breath;  
in the air that fills our bodies with life.  
You are in all things  
yet contained by no thing.  
You are beneath us, O God,  
You are above us.  
Open our eyes to see your vastness in the sky.  
Open our hearts to worship together.  
Open our spirits to your presence.  
Amen

## READINGS & REFLECTIONS

Choose from any of these scripture passages, or others that come to mind:  
Psalm 19, 50, 104, 113; Revelation 1:8

Excerpts from “Praying the Sunset Prayer”, by Jacob Glatstein  
*I'll let you in on a secret  
about how one should pray  
the sunset prayer.  
It's a juicy bit of praying,  
like strolling on grass,  
nobody's chasing you,  
nobody hurries you.  
You walk toward your Creator  
with gifts in pure, empty hands.*

*The words are golden,  
their meaning is transparent,  
it's as though you're saying them  
for the first time...*

*The day is departing with a quiet kiss.  
It lies open at your feet  
while you stand saying the blessings.  
You can't create anything yourself,  
but you can lead the day to its end  
and see clearly the smile  
of its going down...*

“The hours are appointed and named; they are the Lord’s. Life’s fretfulness is transcended. The different and the novel are sweet, but regularity and repetition are also teachers.” - Mary Oliver

Offer a few of your own thoughts on the theme and an invitation for personal reflections. This isn't a full sermon! Just a paragraph or two to focus participants' thoughts.

## **WANDERING & WONDERING**

Invite participants into 30 minutes or so of silence to savor the evening and its graces. People may wander or find a place to sit and watch the sky.

What draws your attention? What does it speak to you of God? What are you noticing about yourself, or about feelings evoked within you? You might choose to reflect on your day – what has been the greatest blessing of your day, or what do you need to let go of?

## **SHARING**

Invite participants into a circle (or break up into small groups) to share with one another any observations, insights, questions, feelings, or reflections that they noticed arise during the time of wandering. What did God want to show you?

## **SENDING**

As we go from here  
may the great lights of the night sky  
remind us of God's abiding presence.  
Bless us this night, O God, and  
enfold us in your holy darkness.  
Amen.