

God's Covenant

a liturgy by Katie Cook

Call to Worship/Reading

FIRST READER: In the beginning, God took delight in creation, and in the fact that the earth made provision for every creature. God said:

SECOND READER: Let us make human beings in our image...

THIRD READER: Let us make them reflect our nature, so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle...

SECOND READER: And, yes, Earth itself...

FIRST READER: Then God spoke to the human beings.

SECOND READER: I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth, and every kind of fruit-bearing tree...

THIRD READER: I've given them to you for food—To all animals and all birds, everything that moves and breathes, I give whatever grows out of the ground for food.

FIRST READER: And there it was. God looked on everything God had made; it was so good, so very good!

—from Genesis 1: 26,29-31a, *The Message*

Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures

Deuteronomy 14:28-15:11

Leviticus 25:1-7



Hymn

Suggestion: "What Does the Lord Require?"

#571 in *The Worshiping Church* (Hope Publishing Company)

Meditation on God's Covenant

The covenant of God is a fearsome thing. "Covenant," after all, means "a contract, an agreement, a compact." When we enter into God's covenant, we are not covenanting to relax. We are not promising to take the easy way out. We are agreeing to submit to the righteous demands of a Holy God.

The covenant community is not to be a cushy retreat from the demands of the world. It should be a boot camp, steeling us for the arduous demands of a jealous God. We sometimes hear so much about God's love, that we fail to heed God's call to righteousness, God's call to holiness, God's call to service.

—Lynn Tatum, "At Ease in Zion," *Speaking of Hunger: Sermons about Challenge and Hope* (www.seedspublishers.org)

The Words from Sinai

ONE: If we can hear the words from Sinai

MANY: Then love will flow from us

ONE: And we shall serve all that is holy

MANY: With all our intellect and all our passion

And all our life.

ONE: If we can serve all that is holy

MANY: Then in a few months when the raining time begins

The rains will flow for us

ONE: The grasses will be green

And the rivers will be filled with life once more.

MANY: All the children of God shall eat

And there will be enough.

ONE: But if we turn from Sinai's words

And serve only what is common and profane

Making gods of our own comfort or our power

MANY: Then the holiness of life will contract for us

The raining time will not come for us

And the produce of the earth will not be ours.

ONE: Or worse

It will be ours unjustly

And our acts shall isolate us

From the flowing waves of green and

gold.

ONE: Let us therefore

Lace these words

Into our passion and our intellect

MANY: And bind them, all of us,

As a sign upon our hands and upon

our eyes,

ONE: Teaching them to our children,

Listening to our children teaching us.

ALL: That our generations may be as

numerous as the stars of heaven

And the dust of the earth,

As faithful as the living waters

That unite them all.

based on Deut. 11:13-21, adapted from a Shabbat service

Reading from the Gospels

Luke 16:19-31



Meditation on the Gospel Reading

Dives didn't go to hell because he was rich. His wealth was an opportunity to bridge the gulf that separated him from his brother Lazarus. Dives went to hell because he passed by Lazarus every day, but he never really saw him. Dives went to hell because he wanted to be a conscientious objector in the war against poverty.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Hymn

“A Place at the Table”

(Hymn #2 in *Sing Justice! Do Justice!*)

Benediction

Go now from this place,
remembering that the God who calls us to mission
also calls us to feasting and dancing.

Let us remember that there are holy days
described in the Jewish texts,
in which there is to be no fasting,
but eating, drinking, and sharing of miracles.

May the one who turned water into wine
turn our tedium into festival,
and show us how to alternate
between commitment
and carnival.

May God's will be done here where we live;
may impossible things come to pass.
May we find strength in the journey
and joy in the struggle,
through the grace of God,
Amen.



The art on this place mat was
created by Sylvia Stockton.

Hunger and Poverty Around the World

compiled by Bessie Hilliard

- 854 million people across the world are hungry, up from 852 million a year ago.
—*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2006*

- Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes—one child every five seconds.

—Robert Black, Saul Morris, & Jennifer Bryce:
“Where and Why Are 10 Million Children Dying Every Year?” *The Lancet*, 2003

- In essence, hunger is the most extreme form of poverty, where individuals or families cannot afford to meet their most basic need for food. Hunger manifests itself in many ways other than starvation and famine. Most poor people who battle hunger deal with chronic undernourishment and vitamin or mineral deficiencies, which result in stunted growth, weakness and heightened susceptibility to illness.

—*Bread for the World Institute, 2004*

- Countries in which a large portion of the population battles hunger daily are usually poor and often lack the social safety nets we enjoy, such as soup kitchens, food stamps, and job training programs. When a family that lives in a poor country cannot grow enough food or earn enough money to buy food, there is nowhere to turn for help.

—*Bread for the World Institute, 2004*

- In 2004, almost 1 billion people lived below the international poverty line, earning less than US\$1 per day.

—*The World Bank, 2007*

- People who live on less than US\$1 per day have problems obtaining adequate, nutritious food for themselves and their families. As a

result, 820 million people in the developing world are undernourished. They consume less than the minimum amount of calories essential for sound health and growth.

—*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2006*

- Undernourishment negatively affects people's health, productivity, sense of hope and overall well-being. A lack of food can stunt growth, slow thinking, sap energy, hinder fetal development and contribute to mental retardation.

—*Bread for the World Institute, 2004*

- Economically, the constant securing of food consumes valuable time and energy of poor people, allowing less time for work and earning income. Socially, the lack of food

erodes relationships and feeds shame so that those most in need of support are often least able to call on it.

—*Bread for the World Institute, 2004*

Hunger and Poverty in the US

- In 2003, 11.2 percent of US households were considered food insecure, which is defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” 16.6 percent of households with children were food insecure. 18.2 percent of children were considered to be food insecure.

—*USDA 2003, Measuring Food Insecurity and Hunger*

- About 35.1 million Americans—including nearly one in four American children—do not have access to sufficient food. Of these, 22.7 million are adults (10.4 percent of all adults) and 12.4 million are children (16.9 percent of all children).
—*US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2006: “Household Food Security in the United States”*

- In the US, 3.3 percent of children under the age of five are stunted for their age and 1.1 percent of children under five are underweight, while 7 percent of children under the age of five are overweight for their age.

—*World Health Organization, 2002*

- The prevalence of males who are 15 years and older who are obese is 31.1 percent. The prevalence of females who are 15 years and older who are obese is 33.2 percent.

—*World Health Organization, 2004*