

Bread, Rest and Strength for the Journey

A Youth-led Communion Service for a Weary Congregation

by Katie Cook and John Garland

Note: This service is designed to be led by youth, but it could actually be led by any group within the congregation. You will need baskets or trays (preferably of wicker or wood), different kinds of bread (for instance, baguettes, tortillas, pita, round sourdough loaves, or pumpernickel—but you need to make sure it is all easy to tear into pieces), and bunches of red grapes.

At one point in the service, your leaders will ask the congregants to form two lines facing each other (perhaps down the aisles of the sanctuary). If you have a large group, you may want to have two or more sets of these lines. Your worship leaders will send the trays down from both ends of these lines, so you will need two baskets or trays per set of lines. Get the youth to arrange an assortment of breads with grapes on each basket or tray.

You will need six readers for readings, a reading chorus (with a leader) and a person for both the invocation and benediction. (The youth may prefer to voice their own prayers. Please encourage them to do so if this is the case.)

We have suggested hymns here, but please feel free to be creative and improvise according to your congregation's personality and needs. Your youth might be also interested in adding their own touches with homemade banners, interpretive dance or their own choices for music. They might want to insert some kind of special music in the form of a solo or choral anthem. You also may prefer to use other translations of the scriptures.

The scriptures below are based on the New Revised Standard Version.

Invocation

God, you are our Creator, who shaped the earth and all its creatures, who invented the wheat and the corn, the rice and the grape. You are the source of our life, the one who nurtures us as if we were small children. We are thirsty and hungry, without resources, and we are exhausted.

We call unto you today because, as usual, we have pushed ourselves to the limit. We have tried to accomplish things on our own. We need your nourishment. We need your comfort. We need to gain strength from being with you. Come to us, come into our midst. Feed us.

Reading

I Kings 19:1-8

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey

into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

Hymn

"Help Us Accept Each Other"
—particularly the last verse:

Lord, for today's encounters with all who are in need, who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread, we need new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on, renew us with your spirit, Lord, free us, make us one!

(words: Fred Kaan, 1975; music: John Ness Beck, 1977, hymn # 437, *The Worshiping Church*, Hope Publishing Company)

Reading: Isaiah 55:1-3a

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

Note: At this point, instruct the worship leaders to

help the congregation to form into facing lines. Don't tell the congregation yet what is in store. (You might want to have someone playing guitar or organ while the lines are forming. Songs like "Let Us Break Bread Together" or "In Remembrance of Me" would be appropriate here.) After the lines are formed, instruct one of the worship leaders to explain that bread and grapes will be coming down the lines, and that each congregant is asked not to feed himself/herself, but to feed the person across the aisle. Each person should tear off a piece of bread and feed it to his/her partner, and then tear off a grape and do the same. As he/she does this, he/she could say, "Bread for the journey. May the Peace of Christ go with you." As the congregants are doing this, the reading chorus should begin:

Choral Reading

LEADER: Come, every one of you who is thirsty,

CHORUS: Come to the waters.

LEADER: And all of you who are hungry and have no money for food,

CHORUS: Come on! You can buy all the food you need!

LEADER: The angel said to Elijah,

CHORUS: "Get up and eat! Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you."

LEADER: Jesus said,

CHORUS: "Eat and remember who I am, so that you will remember who you are."

Note: The following readings are also for reading while the people partake of the food. We suggest that you assign them to the reading chorus, since they will already be in place.

FIRST READER: The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread.'" (Exodus 16:11-12a)

SECOND READER: Seek the Lord while God may be found. Call upon God while God is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that the Lord may have mercy on them, and to our God, for God

will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:6-9)

THIRD READER: Then Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:19-20)

Note: At this point, ask the people to be seated again.

Hymn

“Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service”

—*particularly the first two verses:*

Lord, whose love is humble service bore the weight of human need, who upon the cross, forsaken, worked your mercy’s perfect deed: we, your servants, bring the worship not of voice alone, but heart, consecrating to your purpose, every gift which you impart. Still your children wander homeless, still the hungry cry for bread; still the captives long for freedom, still in grief we mourn our dead. As you, Lord, in deep compassion healed the sick and freed the soul, By your Spirit send your power to our world to make it whole.

(words: Albert F. Bayly, 1961; suggested tune:

—*John Garland is a Mennonite pastor and agricultural organizer in San Juan, Texas, near the Mexico border. Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor. From Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 2000, “There Was No One Needy Among Them.”*

Beach Spring, hymn # 426, The Worshiping Church, Hope Publishing Company.) Note: Ask the congregation to stand (if able) at this point.

Benedictory Petition

Holy God, Feed us with the bread we need for this day.

Infuse us with the strength and passion for the days to come. Walk with us, sing your song into our hearts, stay with us to the end of the journey. For we cannot make it without you.

Amen.

Benedictory Reading

Isaiah 55:10-13

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.