

God: A Breath of Fresh Air

Camping Sunday Service

by Randy Crozsmán

Background Information

The following service is prepared for Camping Sunday. It draws its flow from our theological understanding of *ruach* (Hebrew), i.e. air in motion—wind—breath—Spirit. Camping provides a rich environment for campers to make the connections from wind in creation to God's Spirit within every life form. The Buddhist tradition of meditation knows that mindfulness breathing is a powerful path toward spiritual awareness. To this end, this service both opens and closes with a guided meditation, the first to create awareness of God within, the second in the response to the first meditation and the insight derived throughout the service. It calls us to share the breath of spirit life with others.

Music suggestions are offered at the end. With some revisions, this service can stand on its own, yet the focus on camping as lifted up throughout the service reaffirms the central place and importance of Christian camping and of the marvellous sites within which this ministry is lived and celebrated. Feel free to adapt as necessary.

You will need

- to create a campfire using small logs; red, orange, and yellow tissue; and a light source
- a campfire song with copies for the congregation

Camping Sunday Liturgy

WE GATHER TO GIVE GOD PRAISE

Music prelude

Guided Meditation God Breathes Life

Sit up straight...feet flat on the floor...nothing in your hands; place them comfortably on your lap...close your eyes...relax...notice your breathing... don't change it in any way, just notice...notice your breath...notice your rate of

breathing...notice the depth of each in-breath... (*pause while people focus on breathing*).

If possible, draw your in-breath through your nose and exhale your out-breath through your mouth...continue to breathe in this way...become as one with your breath... (*pause*).

As you continue your breathing, sense a cool breeze on your face...allow this breeze to remind you of (*name your camp or a familiar outdoor site, or say "the seashore/lakeshore"*). See yourself there... (*pause*).

Feel again the breeze...feel it on your face...on your hands...in your hair...notice how fresh it is...it seems to blow away the dust of your daily routine...it blows away *your* busyness...it blows away negative energy: worries, doubts, fear...it feels invigorating....

You can sense energy building up within you...you feel great...you feel connected with all that is around you...where does this wonderful breeze come from?...notice that it comes toward you from in front of you...and from above...in fact, it seems to be coming from all around you...and it seems to be entering into your being at each place that it touches you...this breeze is giving you life...it is life itself...it is good...recognize and acknowledge that this breeze comes from God...this breeze is God's own breath... (*pause*).

God sends this breath in love...it is for you...it is God's gift of life to you...it is God's own Spirit, come to dwell within you...come to bless you...come to guide you...enjoy God's breath for a few moments...and when you are ready to join in our service of worship, come back to this worship space and the others around you...throughout our worship be mindful of your breathing...be mindful of God's own breath within....

Call to Worship

One: And on that day, they were all gathered together.

All: Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the place where they were.

One: And there appeared to them tongues like fire

All: that rested on each one of them.

One: And they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

All: such that each could understand the languages of all the others!

(Acts 2: 1-4)

Opening Prayer

Living, breathing, life-giving Creator, we too have gathered to give thanks and praise. We open our mouths, our lungs, our very souls to receive your breath, like

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the fresh invigorating breezes from the bay that colour our cheeks, sweep our hair, and cool our parched throats. Dwell within us. May we:

- be filled with understanding and compassion
- experience community with one another
- hear your voice calling from the shadows of injustice
- and develop an abiding respect for the fragility of our planet

May it be. Amen.

Hymn of Praise/Song

"Breathe on Me, Breath of God" (*Voices United* 382)

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

Focus with Children The Gifts of Camp

(If possible, create a campfire using small logs, red, orange, and yellow tissue, and a light source. Perhaps sing a campfire song with copies for the congregation. Invite the children to come and gather around the campfire. Describe an imaginary day at camp, e.g. morning watch, swimming, baseball game, crafts, singing, eating together in cabin groups. If you have campers in the group, invite their suggestions. Describe the campsite in the same way, with emphasis on the variety of creation easily observed. Pretending that it is now day's end at camp, and that campfire will end with a prayer of thanksgiving, invite the children to name the parts of nature, the activities, people, etc. for which they specifically want to say "Thanks" to God. You may want to list these offerings on a flipchart.)

(Lead the children in the prayer. Here's a suggested format.)

Today has been a great day, God.

We've enjoyed so much in your beautiful world here at camp. We especially want to thank you for... *(list)*.

We will do our best to care for your world, each other, and ourselves each and every day.

And...oh yes, thank you for being with us all day! Amen.

Hymn/Song

Readings of Scripture

Genesis 2: 4b-9

With God's breath humanity was born

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Life from dry bones

Psalms 146 (VU pg. 868)

A hymn of praise for God's help

John 20: 19-23

Jesus appears to his disciples

Special Music

Meditation I Will Put My Spirit Within You

(Reflect on the scriptures above. Note the transition of the opening and closing meditations. Maintain the context of the camp setting. Develop the following points.)

- All life begins with God's creative will.
- The fresh air and the wind are both expression and symbol for life with fullness and meaning.
- When God/Christ breathes into us, the Spirit of Life dwells within.
- The setting, community, and experience of camps provide one of the richest opportunities for this knowing.
- Thus filled, we are entrusted with God's way for creation.
- Our ministry (purpose in life) is, through word and witness, to breathe compassion, justice, and joy into the places of waiting breathlessness.

Hymn/Song

WE RESPOND IN JOY AND FAITH

Offering Invitation

Offering Music

Dedication

Generous God, may these gifts given gratefully be brought to life through the power of your creative Spirit. Multiply and use them to bring the word and touch of Jesus to your people in this place and throughout the world. Amen.

Prayers of the People *(choose one or both of the following prayers)*

"O Mystery beyond our defining and confining..." (See page 65 in *Celebrate God's Presence*. To reproduce, permission has to be obtained from Mowbray Publishing; see *Celebrate God's Presence*, page 741, for details.)

or

"Gracious God, you are so good to us..." by Robin Brown Hewitt (See page 526 in *Celebrate God's Presence*. Permission to reproduce should be sought through the Worship Office at The United Church of Canada.)

Prayer of Jesus

Closing Hymn/Song

Guided Meditation We Breathe God's Life

Return to a meditative posture...both feet on the floor...back straight...hands on lap...close your eyes...re-connect with your breathing...notice it for what it is...don't try to change it, simply be aware...feel deeply connected with your breath...*(pause)*.

Imagine that you are at camp (*or whatever was suggested in the opening meditation*) once more...drink in the beauty around you... acknowledge the thankfulness you feel...notice the breeze...feel it on your body...feel it penetrating into every pore...remember that God has breathed the Spirit of Life into you...*(pause)*.

Acknowledge the peace and the joy that being filled with the Spirit brings... *(pause)*... acknowledge this as God's free gift to you...acknowledge that there are many, whom you know, that do not realize that God's Spirit dwells within them also...determine that you will share your faith in God's indwelling spirit and the goodness it brings...know that as God has breathed life into you, you will breathe that life into others... *(pause)*.

Return your focus to your breathing...when you are ready re-enter this time and place, that we might be commissioned and blessed in our ministries yet to be...

Blessing

Go forth,
for the love of God within you, is yours to share,
the peace of Christ within you, is yours to extend,
the power of God's Spirit within you, is yours to offer.

(adapted from Worship for All Seasons, Vol. II, The United Church Publishing House, 2006)

Music Postlude

Music Suggestions

- "Teach Me, God, to Wonder" (*Voices United* 299)
- "O Holy Spirit, Enter In" (VU 369)
- "As Comes the Breath of Spring" (VU 373)
- "Come and Find the Quiet Centre" (VU 374)
- "Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness" (VU 375)
- "She Comes Sailing on the Wind" (VU 380)
- "Jesus, You Have Come to the Lakeshore" (VU 563)
- "I Feel the Winds of God" (VU 625)

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