



“One Step” Peace Worship Service

This worship service may be used whenever there is a community celebration of peace, be it International Peace Day on Sept. 21, Peace Sunday on the first Sunday of November, when the need for reconciliation arises, or at other times when global affairs cry for attention. The service assures participants that even the smallest action to create peace, though seemingly inconsequential, will be part of God’s way of creating shalom in creation.

Notes for Worship Leaders

Preparation

Find volunteers to participate as “Voices” (see below). Prepare Prayers of the People that reflect current peace concerns.

Pacing

Due to the enormity of the call to action for peace, many moments of silence are incorporated—allow that space for people to let their feelings settle into their being. Also, in order to bless the giving, the offertory prayer is set *before* the collection of the offering.

Dramatic Element: “Voices”

“Voices,” a dramatic element, appears three times through the course of the service. A group of people (minimum four) represents the reasons people give for not working for justice and peace more directly in the Canadian civic space or with regional and global partners. Each voice is a person who has a large sign with one such reason. For example:

Voice 1—“I’m too young”

Voice 2—“It’s someone else’s turn”

Voice 3—“I’m stuck at home a lot”

Voice 4—“I’m too old”

Voice 5—“There will always be war”

Be an active listener when you ask people to act for peace, and you will likely hear more reasons!

Invite people who are comfortable to shout out in church and are able to move in the sanctuary. Here are the suggested movements for each of the “Voices” entries:

Voices I—Each voice in turn stands up, holds up his or her sign so all can see, shouts out the phrase, and sits back down. Depending on the size of the congregation, people may have to shout their phrase more than once in order for all to hear and see. Allow a long pause between each voice. Then light the Christ Candle as a counterpoint to the words and actions just witnessed. The Prince of Peace is present in the space and all shall keep silent. In other words, the eternal flame of peace will silence all the reasons we may have for not acting for just peace.

Voices II—After singing the Lord’s Prayer, the children will likely be either returning to their seats or leaving for church school. When the children’s movement has settled, each of the voices stands up and slowly, with head bowed, shoulders slumped, and a sad look, moves to the communion table to place the card in front, so that the words remain visible. Then, walking straighter and more briskly, with a smile—as with a burden lifted—they return to their seats.

Children’s Time: The Brave Little Parrot

The children’s story is a Buddhist folktale from India, “The Brave Little Parrot.” It speaks to the importance of doing something even if your actions seem inconsequential due to the enormity of the obstacle you’re facing. The brave little parrot did what she could in the face of seemingly overwhelming evidence that her actions were of no consequence. It was precisely the hopeless actions that created a response in the eagle-god. In this fable about the nature of possibility, we discover that possibilities come from outside of us, from within us, and most importantly, they also come *because* of us. A dramatic storyteller will not need props as the story is riveting in and of itself.

The story may be found in various versions, including Rafe Martin’s *The Brave Little Parrot* (Putnam Juvenile, 1998) or on the website of the Healing Story Alliance at www.healingstory.org/treasure/little_parrot/brave_little_parrot.html.

Contemporary Word (Sermon): “One Step”

“Then [God] said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.’”
(Exodus 14:15)

The people of Israel have to take *one step forward* in order for God’s plan to be put in motion. They have to have enough faith to take one step into the very obstacle that seems insurmountable—and then God will provide a path.

The Israelites are facing a seemingly insurmountable obstacle—impending death by the rapidly approaching Pharaoh’s army or death in the Sea of Reeds. What does God say to all their frantic prayers? *Move your feet, just one step, go*—that’s the essence of God’s answer to an immobilized people. To a people tired of the journey, a people scared, a people unable to react to the immensity of the obstacle before them, God says, *move forward!*

When the people who face the obstacle move their bodies into it, the way through the obstacle becomes clearer. They have no certainty but they have all the clarity of purpose. And so the cries and prayers of the people come alive in walking into the very obstacle in front of them. The people are expecting God to respond to their prayers by acting on their behalf. Instead, God’s answer is for the people to become participants in the fulfillment of their own prayers! The sound of their first step into the obstacle became the response of those prayers lifted to God.

The Bible is a long story about the relationship of God and creation, how humans and their small efforts create the catalyst for the change that God has in mind and that is still waiting to unfold. At the heart of this long biblical story is the truth that a human response of action, no matter how hopeless or inconsequential it may seem, is like a powerful prayer that touches the heart of God. In response, God acts to save God’s creation.

Go forward—move—take one step.

What other examples illustrate that the smallest of actions by one person can indeed set in motion something far more reaching and powerful?

- Terry Fox is one that everyone is likely to connect to. His first one step has become a motion of people raising millions for cancer research.
- What about Jean Béliveau? Less a household name, yet he is walking, one step at a time for an anticipated 12 years to raise awareness of non-violence for the sake of the children of the world. See www.wwalk.org.
- Béliveau and many others are inspired by the Peace Pilgrim, Mildred Norman Ryder, who walked the American landscape from 1953 to 1981. Her message: “One little person giving all her time to peace, can make news. Many people, giving some of their time, can make history.” See www.peacepilgrim.org/FoPP.

How can this motivate us to take one step for peace now, even if it seems like our action will have no effect? One phone call, one visit, one petition is an act of solidarity, a statement of consciousness, a movement of advocacy. But most importantly, it is a way for God to move through us to create just peace.

Alternative Sermon Suggestions

There is no more poignant a story of unleashing God’s grace than the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The decision of the son to “get up and go” (v. 18) puts in motion the journey, one step at a time, back to the father’s home. Notice that while the son walks to the father, the father runs to him (v. 20). Our one step toward peace will be greeted with so much more by God’s living presence among us!

The story of Esther provides another example of the need to step into an obstacle in order to have God’s plan of salvation begin to unfold more clearly. Esther is confronted with the challenge to try and save her people from Haman’s plot of revenge (Esther 3:6). Having perhaps become a queen for “such a time as this” (4:14), Esther agrees to approach the king and make her request. She takes a step toward him, touches the golden sceptre, and begins to unfold her plan, which might cost her life. God indeed delivers the people of Israel from Haman’s revenge because Esther is willing to take that one step into the seemingly insurmountable obstacle.



Worship Service

Gathering with Hope

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

Sisters and brothers,
enter into this space together to worship the Holy One.
Let us rejoice, for God offers us freedom through our Lord Jesus Christ
and gives us the Spirit to be children of God
and to live free from fear and of insignificance.

**We come to walk with Jesus;
the same way Jesus walked down the streets of Jerusalem
and throughout the countryside.
We come to remember the simple act of walking
as defiance against oppression,
and the simple act of writing
as calling attention to injustice;
each creates the peace and love that Jesus teaches us.
God we come!**

Inspired by the Dec. 10, 2007 Human Rights Liturgy by the World Student Christian Federation—Asia-Pacific.

Voices I

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Silent Meditation

If we would be your people, Blessed God,
we must look in the windows of the world:
to see as you see,
to love as you love,
to act as you act.

Through us,
you would stand by the poor,
supporting them at the beginning of their distress,
not when they are at the end of their hope.

Through us,
you would side with the oppressed,
and challenge us to release them
from their tyranny and torture.

Through us,
you would speak for the voiceless,
and call the powerful to meek and lowly lives.

Through us, you would...

Beloved Holy One:
help us to be doers,
not just hearers
of your heart.

Adapted, with permission, from "You would..." by Thom M. Shuman (c) 2006 (<http://prayersfortoday.blogspot.com/2006/09/you-would.html>)

Opening Prayer

Holy One, Creator and Spirit of Life

**We thank you for the gift of this day
and this gathering of your people.**

We have come with our joys and our brokenness.

We have come with our certainties and our confusion.

We have come with our insignificance and our power.

Teach us.

Reach us.

Nourish us.

Then set us forth

to walk,

to talk,

to write,

to live your message of peace in our corner

and through all the lands. Amen.

Hymn of Praise

"Sing Your Joy" (*Voices United* 253)

Listening with Hope

Prayer of Confession

Eternal God,

save us from weak resignation to violence
and jar us from the persistent underestimation
of our abilities to help others.

Help us to remember that the faceless ones
and our enemies

eat food the same as us

are hurt by weapons the same as us

are lonely behind walls the same as us

and have children with dreams the same as ours.

Forgive our excuses

Forgive our indifference

Forgive our lack of solidarity... (*silent meditation*)

Words of Assurance

Hear the good news: Christ is our peace.
Christ has united those who were separated.
Christ has broken down the walls of hostility.
Christ has given wings to our steps on the path of justice.
Rejoice in the Lord, the kin(g)dom is at hand! Amen.

Children's Time

"The Brave Little Parrot," a Buddhist folktale from India

The Lord's Prayer (Sung)

Voices United 959/960

Voices II

Scripture Readings

Exodus 14: 11–16

Psalms 85 (*Voices United 802*)

Romans 12:9–21

Luke 18:1–9

Hymn of Response

"O Day of Peace" (*Voices United 682*)

Contemporary Word

"One Step"

Responding with Hope

Offering Invitation

Peace is generosity, not a silence. The risk is ours to take. We choose to act and share our time, talents, and treasures. We choose to step with God into the obstacles so that peace becomes the path to walk.

Offering Presentation Hymn

"Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands" (*Voices United 537*)

A Call to Action

Grant us peace that will
BREAK our silence in the midst of violence
then prophetic voices shall resonate

Grant us peace that will
EMPTY us of hate and intolerance
then we'll turn guns into guitars and sing

Grant us peace that will
PULL US DOWN from the steeple of our pride
then we'll learn to wash each other's feet

Grant us peace that will
DISTURB us in our apathy
then we'll dance together under the sun

Excerpted with permission from International Day of Prayer for Peace 2005 (Philippines). World Council of Churches—Ecumenical Service in Palestine and Israel, 4–10 June 2008, a joint advocacy initiative convened by the World Council of Churches.

Passing of Peace

The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you...

**We rise to greet our neighbours
in the solidarity of the Prince of Peace.**

Centring Song

“O God We Call” (sing 3 times) (*Voices United* 411)

Prayers of the People

Holy One,

**we know that we are not alone,
we live in your world.**

**We know that you call each of us
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil.**

**We know that each of us carries within our self
your vision of all creation healed and restored.**

**Because we are partners with you
in caring for this creation and the worldwide community of people,
Holy One, listen to our pleading hearts... (a moment of silence)**

(Add your own prayers for peace as appropriate.)

Grant us the courage to continue our solidarity with these your people as they face seemingly insurmountable obstacles to peace... *(a moment of silence)*

Gracious God, your love knows no limits.

**Fill our hearts with your compassion,
open our eyes to your presence in the world
and enlarge our minds to understand your will.**

**Take our hands and minister through them.
Speak through our words and direct our feet
in the path of peace, that Christ may be revealed in us
and the world may believe. Amen.**

Final stanza from International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 4-10 June 2008, a joint advocacy initiative convened by the World Council of Churches. Used with permission.

Scattering with Hope

Empowering Hymn

“Though Ancient Walls” (*Voices United* 691)

Commissioning and Blessing

“Prayer for Peace” (*Voices United* 692)

May we now take that one step into the world and embrace it as you have embraced us.

Know that the blessing of God—Creator, Christ, and Spirit—is with us this day and always. Amen.

Adapted from a service originally written by the Rev. Tiina Cote for the United for Peace Campaign..