# Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places

**A Service of Worship for Children’s Sunday**

*Prepared by Janice MacLean*

**Notes**:

This liturgy focuses on children’s right to play.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ([www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm)) includes Article 31, which affirms a right to

* rest and leisure
* play and recreational activities
* participation in cultural life and the arts

What is play? It’s hard to define. It’s like trying to translate crying or laughing into words. But we know it when we see it.

The liturgy invites us to use images, silence, movement, and poetry and a few words to help us remember the gift of play as part of our innate spirituality. We pray all children experience the right to play.

The line “Christ plays in ten thousand places” is drawn from the Gerald Manley Hopkins poem “As Kingfishers Catch Fire.”

## Opening Responses

When children play on the streets of Kenya and Afghanistan, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(*name two places in the news lately)*,and here in \_\_\_ (*insert your town)*

**Christ plays in ten thousand places**.

When children create their own spaces for mystery and wonder,

**Christ plays in ten thousand places.**

When children play outdoors for the pleasure and joy of being able to,

**Christ plays in ten thousand places.**

When children tumble and chase, play-fight and climb trees,

**Christ plays in ten thousand places.**

**We gather in worship celebrating in God’s eye what in God’s eye we are—  
Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places.**

## Gathering Prayer: Let Us Play

*By Sheree Fitch*

Let me huddle in the muddle of a slush-delicious mess!  
Grass stain green on my knees and bestest dress.  
Let me jump in the jungle of the trees in my yard  
I can chirp like the birds if I listen extra hard.  
  
Let me run in the sun on an August afternoon  
Skip in the rain to a rain-drop dripping tune.  
Let me hop like a rabbit as it scurries on its way  
Let me see, let me touch, let me find, let me play!  
  
Let me leap like a leopard over shadows that I see!  
Run like an antelope where antelopes run free  
Let me giggle in the gaggle of a tag-playing gang  
Let me out, let me in, let me shout, let me bang!  
  
Give me rules to be fair, give me lessons how to share  
But let me wriggle as I figgle all about what is there  
Let me clamber over boulders!  
Climb the highest hills I find—  
Let me do it now and then on my very own time!  
  
In the stormiest of weather  
Let us play all together—  
Because everyone’s  
On everybody’s team.  
  
In the running and the why-ing  
In the funning and the sky-flying  
In the hopping and the trying  
In the hoping and the high-five-ing  
  
Let us play.  
Let us play  
Let us dream!

*(Commissioned by Recreation Nova Scotia. Used with permission.)*

## We Are a Forgetful People

We are a forgetful people.

When we came through the dangerous waters of the flood

Abraham led the praying.

Remind us, O God, we are a forgetful people.

When we walked through the dangerous waters of the Red Sea

Miriam led the dancing.

Remind us, O God, we are a forgetful people.

When we were carried into exile

Prophets and fools led the hoping.

Remind us, O God, we are a forgetful people.

When we came home rejoicing

Ezra and Nehemiah led the dreaming.

Remind us, O God, we are a forgetful people.

When we heard the Baby giggle

Stars and angels led the singing.

Remind us, O God, we are a forgetful people.

When we stood by death’s transforming

The women led the waiting.

Remind us, O God, we are a forgetful people.

When we heard that Jesus is still with us

Mary led the wondering.

Remind us, O God, we are a forgetful people.

When we saw the Spirit crackle

Peter led the proclaiming.

Remind us, O God, we are a forgetful people.

We are a forgetful people. Remind us again that praying, dancing, hoping, dreaming, singing, waiting, wondering, and proclaiming are the gifts of a playful church and the marks of faithful community.

*Silence*.

Once play belonged to us and through play we rearranged our world.

God, the First Player, calls to us again and again.

“You are my people, ever at play in my presence.”

We are reminded. We remember. We are ready.

## Readings from Our Tradition

A reading from the Book of Proverbs. It is Wisdom that is speaking. We hear it twice. Listen for a whisper of deep memory.

“Yahweh created me when God’s purpose first unfolded, before the oldest of God’s work. From everlasting I was firmly set, from the beginning; before earth came into being … I was by God’s side, a master crafter, delighting God day by day, ever at play in God’s presence, at play everywhere in the world.” (Proverbs 8:22–23,30–31, adapted from The Jerusalem Bible)

A Song from the Psalms:

“Psalm 100: Make a Joyful Noise,” *Voices United*, p. 820

Sing with full bodily expression of the goodness of God!

An introduction to the parable: The Parable of the Children Playing in the Marketplace (Luke 7:31–35)

*Hold silence for wondering.*

## Meditation

Choose one of these ways to remember play as deep memory and prepare our hearts for a time for prayer on children’s right to play.

### Visio Divina

*Lectio* *divina* (divine reading) is a way of praying with the words of scripture. *Visio* *divina* (divine seeing) is a way of praying with images. Through the non-verbal practice of *visio divina* we open our heart to God’s presence through an image. We listen with the ears of our hearts and allow our prayer to shape our life.

Choose an image or photograph that evokes play. You will know it when you see it. Here are some examples:

* “Children Playing Soccer Near Disused Fort, Kabul, Afghanistan” or “Playing in the Snow, 1875” by Herbert William Weekes, available from [www.allposters.ca](http://www.allposters.ca)
* “Children Playing in Kabul” on Camilla Fuhr’s blog at <http://inthesandbox.wordpress.com>
* Emil Nolde’s “Jesus and the Children”; the image of children playing in the stream of maples leaves on the Canadian War Memorial in London, England

(Please review the copyright guidelines for congregations at [www.united-church.ca/local/copyright](http://www.united-church.ca/local/copyright), or look for imagery with a Creative Commons permission for public use.)

For a practical way of leading people through the practice of praying with images, see [www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Praying-with-Art-Visio-Divina.html](http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Praying-with-Art-Visio-Divina.html).

### Dialogue

Invite sharing on this question or one like it: *What were you doing when your mother called you in for supper and you didn’t hear? What kind of play, activity, or toy really absorbed you or energized you as a child?*

After hearing the play history of several people, ask: *What was the key quality or outcome of your childhood play experience?*

Now, look at the qualities or outcomes shared: In what ways could these be *spiritual* qualities or outcomes?

The qualities of the childhood play we recall are often qualities of the spirituality we seek as adults. Play and spirituality are deeply linked. Playfulness is wisdom. Play is the elemental and essential spiritual practice. (See the reading from Proverbs 8.) Nurturing a playful life allows us to come close to God and God to come close to us.

### Questions for a Reflection on the Parable of the Children Playing in the Marketplace

### Luke 7:31–35

How we name a parable implies an interpretation. What titles have you seen for this parable? How would you name it?

This parable is often interpreted as a parable by which adults are compared to children who are unwilling to listen or to do what they are told. Instead of being compared to children, what can adults learn from children? Why did the children refuse to play?

In this parable we have a game that did not take place. Why?

What kind of play will it take to know what the kingdom is about?

What is this parable saying about the kingdom of God?

## A Time of Prayer in Two Voices

Children play to understand the world around them.

*Let us pray that adults remember their play and commit to supporting children’s play.   
May we refuse to dismiss play as frivolous or a luxury or attempt to restrict it through fear.*

**Silence***.*

Children’s play is fundamental to survival, well-being, health and development.

*Let us pray that all children have time, space, and licence to play.*

**Silence**.

War, violence, discrimination, abuse, exploitative labour, water and food shortages, and other toxic stressors are obstacles to play.

*Let us pray that adults take action to reduce these and protect the right of children to be children.*

**Silence**

Children need a play environment that gives them the feeling that the world is full of things to explore, where space and resources evoke imaginative play.

*Let us pray for the provision of safe playgrounds for all children and especially for child refugees, disabled children, and those from minority groups. May safe play space be restored quickly following natural disasters and emergency situations.*

**Silence**

Children, as children, have a different way of seeing, feeling, and acting in the world. This comes alive in their play.

*Let us pray that in supporting children’s right to play, we pay attention not simply to the outward expressions of play, but to the conditions in which “playfulness” thrives.*

**Silence**

Children use play to make order in a chaotic world.

*Let us pray for children whose daily lives are chaotic, unpredictable, or violent.*

**Silence**

All children play.

*Let us pray for the children we hold close to our heart.*

**Silence**

Gathering voices together we pray together: Our Mother/Our Father ….

## Blessing

Go into the world:

Dance, laugh, sing and create.

**We go with the assurance of your blessing, O God.**

Go into the world:

Risk, explore, discover and love.

**We go with the assurance of your grace, O God.**

Go into the world:

Believe, hope, struggle, and remember.

**We go with the assurance of your love, O God.**

**Thanks be to God!**

*(Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia.   
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Alternatively, you may want to Google the poem, “*A Suspended Blue Ocean”* by Hafiz (c.1320) and share the image of paying attention to play in God’s Wild Playground.

## Suggested Hymns

*Voices United*

#7 Hope Is a Star

#424 May the God of Hope Go with Us

#624 Give to Us Laughter

#647 Travel On, Travel On (especially verse 3)

p. 892 Wisdom 7, Who Comes from God

*More Voices*

#43 The Play of the Godhead

#133 Jesus Laughed Out Loud

#156 Dance with the Spirit

#157 I Am a Child of God