

Madison Mennonite Church
Koinonia Worship

July 25, 2021

GATHERING

*Was your group able to have a conversation last time about risk mitigations? Are there members joining for the first time that need to be brought into that conversation? **For groups that have merged with others**, take extra measures to reflect on and share group "norms" and culture, so that all feel a sense of connection and belonging. Then...*

Greet one another and add names to the liturgy of those who would like to lead, read, or facilitate. Each blank can be filled by a different person, and all ages are encouraged to participate in leadership! Help non-readers with their lines. Everyone reads the "Many" parts, unmuted for groups reading virtually. Re-mute afterward.

Call to Worship: Leader _____

Adapted from VT #984

Leader: This day, God, may we dream your dreams:

Many: This day, God, may we reflect your love;

Leader: This day, God, may we do your work:

Many: This day, God, may we taste your peace.

Lighting our Candles: Leader _____

Leader: Each week, we light a candle to symbolize Christ's presence with us and the unity we have with our beloved siblings at Madison Mennonite.

Light candles

Leader: Christ, our light, bless our fellowship with your Spirit's presence. We remember other MMC Koinonia Groups and pray that we are all united in love and peace. Amen.

HEARING the WORD: Reader _____

Reader: A reading from Matthew 15:21-28.

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Optional tactile engagement: Invite all ages, but children especially, to consider and reflect on what they would do to help others. Charade the idea for the group and have the group guess what the person--again, child or adult!--is showing.

Guiding Reflection: Reader: _____

The circumstances of the past year and a half have me thinking about service. Service to others, one of the central tenets of Mennonite faith, seems especially relevant, but also especially difficult, during this time when loneliness and depression, domestic conflict and abuse, and loss of income and jobs have impacted millions. These staggering challenges have further been complicated by lockdowns that have made travel and face to face contact difficult.

As I struggle with the puzzle of how to be of service, one of the stories that has come to mind is the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman. At first glance, this story appears to speak only of personal faith. The woman's faith is rewarded with the healing of her daughter. End of story. But looking at it more closely, the tale is also about service. Jesus helps the woman. Strangely, unlike many other stories of healing in the Gospels, this one contains a puzzling twist. Jesus is a reluctant participant. When asked for his help, Jesus refuses. It is only after he engages in conversation with the woman that he relents, and provides assistance.

Over the years, the word "service" has come to hold a tangled blend of meanings. It has been used to describe anything from selfless aid all the way to self-serving public relations efforts (as in "political service"). To some it means helping others achieve the goals they have for themselves; to others it means setting the needy on the path to the proper sort of life. Serving others can be incredibly self-sacrificial when it considers the welfare of the served, or just as incredibly self-serving when it focuses on the image of the ones performing the service.

This tension is evident in Matthew's story of the Canaanite woman. The woman with the sick child forces Jesus to declare whose welfare he is pursuing. Does he only mean to elevate his status among his own people, or is he willing to put that aside to contribute to the welfare of someone who asks for assistance, but doesn't fit neatly into his plan? Was he willing to provide the woman with what she identified as her need, or did he have to control the situation by parceling out on his own terms the resources he thought the woman might lack?

Jesus' response to the woman's request is instructive. He speaks with her, and listens. Relationship and conversation are critical if I wish to serve others. Not until I am in relationship with those I intend to serve will I grasp what is required for their welfare. Not until we can speak a common language, forged by repeated interactions and conversations, will I understand how my efforts will affect the lives of those I hope to serve. Not until we speak of the things that matter to us both will I grasp the mutuality of service, and the benefits that serving others holds not just for the served, but for the server as well.

As I consider the way forward beyond COVID, and the service that the people of God will be called on to provide, I can start with Jesus' lesson: if I hope to serve, I must start now to build the relationships and hold the conversations that will make service possible.

Questions for Group Reflection: Facilitator _____

At its best, worship enables us to strengthen the connections we have to our faith community, to Creation, and to the Divine. Use this time to reflect together, using some or all of the questions below, or spend time in silence or draft your own questions if that is best for your group today.

1. How do we benefit by serving others?



2. Service takes many different forms - physical assistance, political advocacy, solidarity with those who require allies, sitting with those who need compassion. What service feels comfortable to you?
3. How can we serve others without belittling them or controlling their lives?
4. As we emerge from this pandemic, how can we engage in relationship with those who are different enough from us that they do not occupy our normal, comfortable social sphere? How do we learn what they need from us? How do we learn what we need from them?

At the closing of this time of sharing, pray together:

Facilitator: Loving Spirit, we give you thanks for this time of discovery in scripture and discernment with one another. May we continue to grow in wisdom and understanding as persons and as a church. Amen.

RESPONDING in PRAYER and FELLOWSHIP

Sharing Joys and Concerns: Leader _____

The Leader invites each person (children included!) to share any joys or concerns they bring to the group. Remind your group that if anyone does not wish to share, they may simply say "pass." After all, including the Leader, have been invited to share, and if no one has something to add after a first round, join in a spirit of prayer (below).

Praying Together

Leader: Holy God, we offer these prayers to you this day, trusting in your faithfulness.
 We pray for ourselves, for our loved ones near and far. *(a moment for silent prayer)*
 We pray for our community, our nation, and our world. *(a moment for silent prayer)*
 Loving God,

Many: hear our prayers. Amen.

Singing Together (optional)

If your group has discerned you are open to singing together, sing VT #778 Will You Let Me Be Your Servant. Online Groups may listen to [this recording](#) of the song.

Sharing the Peace of Christ: Leader _____ VT #1066

One: May the Christ who walks on wounded feet walk with you on the road.

Many: May the Christ who serves with wounded hands stretch out your hands to serve.

One: May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart open your heart to love.

Many: May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet, and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you.

Continued Fellowship



Koinonia Worship July 25, 2021 curated by Todd Shenk.

Sources used:

Bible reading from the NRSV.

Call to Worship and Benediction from Voices Together

Hymn #778 from Voices Together

"Will You Let Me Be Your Servant" performed by Bukas Palad Music Ministry

Announcements:

*Join in a family-friendly, senior-friendly, mountain-averse, all-church hike next Sunday at 9:30am in Cherokee Marsh North Unit. See Pastor Valerie's 7/21 email for more information.

*Next Sunday in All-Church Worship, we will be reflecting on what it means to "bear with one another in love." Your input into the sermon is invite--more info coming on Monday! We also say goodbye to the Prough family and Julian Brubacher as they plan to move from Madison.

This Week's Calendar:

Wed., July 28 -

Care Team, 7:30pm

Community Care Call 8:15pm

Thu., July 28 - Boggle Group 7pm

Sun., Aug. 1 -

Discovering Voices Together 4:30pm,

Worship 5pm, and Fellowship Time

For meeting information, including links to virtual gatherings, please see the weekly e-calendar. To add an event, please email deni@madison-mennonite.org.



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