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Not Ordinary Church

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Raggedy Church: A Call and Response

Allyson Sawtell, 2019

NOTE: The whole service is a call and response – the poetry, read by a worship leader, is the “call” and after each one there is a response by the congregation – a reading, or a prayer, or song or an action. At least, that’s the intent!

The poetry and other readings will be read by one or two readers throughout the service. Anything the congregation does will be indicated as such

This service was done just once so far – before COVID, so I don’t know how it might work on Zoom.

Words of Welcome, Introduction to the service, Announcements

Reading – Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV)

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Meditation/Short sermon on theme, by the pastor.

Pastoral prayer and prayer concerns could fit in here, as well. Offering is already placed elsewhere in the service. If there is to be Communion, that might go nicely somewhere within the liturgy, such as around the Offering Time.

Part I – Prelude and Possibility

NOTE: This could possibly be a responsive reading or unison reading instead of read by one of the worship leaders

When we get serious about the healing of creation, we stop living smoothly in the world.

We become rough edges:

We snag on Conventional Wisdom and Business as Usual

We do not just gently slip by.

We are rough edges. This is our birthright.

And with rough edges proclaiming our imperfections and our possibilities,
we live and move and have our being.

Rough edges don’t allow us to fit in.

We become the burr in the socks, that small stone in the shoe

We are jagged awareness of something different – better

We are rough edges. This is our legacy.

When we live and move and have our raggedy being as healers, lovers, and reconcilers,
we make choices.

Sometimes we welcome denial, its easing of our anxiety and fear, its soft pat on the shoulder.

So that we can fit in and forget.

(And have some peace.)

(Of a sort.)

(For a time.)

Sometimes, through luck or grace, we allow our rough edges to become
occasions for imagination,
opportunities for awakening,
points of courage.

And sometimes, by grace or choice,
we re-member our birthright and our legacy,
and, honoring the uneven jaggedness of our efforts, we push on.

Congregational Song *Calling* (Tune: Simple Gifts/Lord of the Dance)

1. It's our call to live simply; this is Earth's fervent plea:

To be one with Creation, as we were meant to be.

We're all tied together, and connected by life.

We need each other, yet we live in strife.

Refrain:

To live rightly within the Web of Life

Bring healing and justice – not greed and strife.

And when we get ourselves to that place just right,

Creation will dance out of sheer delight!

2. It's our children's right to have a world that is free
from hate, war, and fear, and inhumanity.

To inherit a world where all earth can thrive,

And with love and justice, be truly alive!

Refrain

3. It's our call to be listening, it's a gift to be wise

To hear life growing beneath Creation's cries

To keep finding hope where we thought there was none

To celebrate even small victories won.

Refrain

4. It's our call to live simply, it's our call to be one.

We need each other; God's work is never done.

To live, to love as God would have us be

Then all Creation will truly be free!

Refrain

Part II – Awakening

On our good days, gifted by our rough edges,
 we come awake to Creation's pain (our pain)
 and
 we set out to heal, to reconcile, to regenerate Creation.

On our good days, through choice or relentless grace,
 we come awake to Creation's devastation (our devastation)
 we come awake and shake our heads like a dog shedding water
 What were we thinking??
 Sea levels rise up; poisons pumped into our air, our land, our food; greed consumes,
 poverty swallows whole the most vulnerable among us.

When did we ever think this was a good idea?
 Who are we?

On our good days, we could hope for such an awakening:
 To leap awake, like a dog sensing an uninvited presence.

But we seem to live mostly without question, unawake
 (even when we question and speak out, we *stay* the same)
 Fear feeds denial; courage a distant dream.
 We live unchanged in the shelter of Comfort, Safety, Church, Me.

We could hope for such an awakening.

But we are curled up by the fire, snoozing, dreaming of chasing that cat,
 when we're supposed to leap up and shake our heads –
 our whole bodies – and look around the room,
 for something is not right.

On our good days, we are rough edges
 to tear away denial
 and – awake – to dream.

Readings

The Intergovernmental Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2019

Goals for conserving and sustainably using nature and achieving sustainability cannot be met by current trajectories, and goals for 2030 and beyond may only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political and technological factors. [Transformative means] a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values.

On Care for Our Common Home: Laudato Si' (Pope Francis), 2015

Our goal...is to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.

Part III – Tomb-Time

Flowers peeking out in early spring's warm sun

Then comes frost and snow

Flowers, minus some greenery, again peeking out in late spring

Oh look – a hailstorm

In the aftermath – eventually, surprisingly – some return and begin to bud.

The question is, at what point will they not come back?

What happens when hope dies, and the light goes out in your heart?

Creation's hope is dying; the light is fading from the heart of all life.

This is tomb-time, the day after Good Friday.

This is tomb-time. It was bound to happen sooner or later.

This is where words stop, logic fails, and nothing makes sense.

Let it go. Lie down in the cold and dark for a time.

All that is disappearing is worthy of this grief.

This is tomb-time.

[Silence]

And then. And then.

You begin to hold – however feebly – to the memory of a story
that says the tomb is not the end.

The stone is rolled away – by the grace and strength of those who love you.

Now you decide whether to move through the door into life again.

And it's not just you. Or you. Or you over there in the back pew.

It's all of us – Church – needing to decide if we will step through into new life.

Our destruction of Creation, and our clinging to Business as Usual, seal us into death.

The strength and love of communities of hope will roll the stone away.

Church – what will you decide?

Church – what will you proclaim?

Church – what will you dare to hope?

Church – here and now, you have the choice.

Push back against Business as Usual? Embrace imagination and courage?

Or give in to Good Friday?

It must be here. And it must be now.

[Silence]

Part IV – Breathe

Breathe. Just breathe.
 With sighs too deep for words, just breathe.
 You are held as you breathe; you will not fall.
 Breathe, just breathe.

What do you want to hold, what do you want to give?
 What do you want to keep with you, what do you want to shed?

Breathe. Just breathe.
 Let us breathe together. [*Silence, breathing*]

*Quiet music starts to play this song, and then congregation/choir joins in with
 “Breathe On Me, Breath Of God”*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew.
 That I may love the way you love, and do what you would do.
 Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure.
 Until with you I will one will, to do and to endure.*

OR *“Create In Me a New Heart, O God” (repeated phrase, see Notes)*

Part V – A Blessing Seems Appropriate Here

May your arms be wide open to allow for a broken heart:
 not sheltered in a fearful crouch, but arms flung open, foolishly vulnerable.

The only way to welcome the sort of love that lasts.

May your arms be wide open to welcome imagination. This is courage.

To break from Business as Usual and
 to imagine something new.

To really believe that’s possible.

Even if you will never see it, even if the work outlives you.

Arms wide open – wide enough to embrace
 the questions
 the tomb-time

Arms wide open to embrace
 Curiosity
 Hope

Set free, Oh God, our courage to go forward,
 to climb the rugged canyon with fear in our throats – but to climb.

Congregational Song *Hope and Promise vss 1&2*

(New Century Hymnal, #332; Tune – Beach Spring)

1. Where is hope and where is promise, in a world that's gone astray?
Fear and apathy wreak havoc; web of life just slips away.

Refrain:

When Creation's pain is ours, too, when hard truths we dare to hear,
We will live with power and justice. Hope will triumph over fear.

2. Let's not live in deep denial of Earth's woes, the power of greed.
As we try to build a new world, courage is our deepest need.

Refrain:

Excerpts from “God’s Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States” *(Through the National Council of the Churches)*

We believe that caring for creation must undergird, and be entwined with, all other dimensions of our churches' ministries. We are convinced that it is no longer acceptable to claim to be “church” while continuing to perpetuate, or even permit, the abuse of Earth as God's creation. Nor is it acceptable for our corporate and political leaders to engage in “business as usual” as if the very future of life-support systems were not at stake.

The imperative first step is to repent of our sins, in the presence of God and one another. The second step is to pursue a new journey together, with courage and joy.

Congregational Song *Hope and Promise vss 3&4*

3. Be the hope and be the promise, be the peace the world must know.
This is good work that is hard, too, and frustratingly so slow.

Refrain:

When Creation's pain is ours, too, when hard truths we dare to hear,
We will live with power and justice. Hope will triumph over fear.

4. This is hope and this is promise: laugh and love in spite of fear!
Dare to know you make a difference! Change the world and dry a tear.

Final Refrain:

Then Creation's joy is ours, too. Dance with all we hold so dear.
We have lived with power and justice. Hope has triumphed over fear!

Part VI – Choice and Wonder

We can choose. This is our right. This is our call. This is our response.

We can choose.

We can choose to look around
with wonder bathed in love,
and know something of healing,

something of flourishing, something of hope.

In the face of devastation and grief,
Beauty, connectedness, and life still emerge.
This is true.

We can choose to believe this or not.

We can choose wonder. We can choose connectedness. We can choose beauty.

We can choose hope.

The choice for hope doesn't make it all better.
Sometimes opting for hope makes it all even harder.

But in that choice, then, perhaps, something inside you can open up a crack:
Something of curiosity and light peeks out cautiously from your soul,
wondering if it is yet time for celebration
or at least a smile and a song.

Hold onto that sliver of light
Grasp that shard of a song
Reverently string them onto a silver chain to hang near your heart.

Offering Time

On the Communion table will be: Offering Plates for the financial gifts, a Basket of Blessings (pre-printed blessings and blank paper, and pens to write your own), and Oil for anointing.

People can come forward as music plays, or the choir sings; take a blessing AND give a blessing to someone else. Or anoint someone with the oil, and be anointed by another.

It will be a time of some quiet chaos, where we tend to each other (and bring forth our financial offerings, too, of course!). Don't just come forward and take something; offer something to another as well.

Unison Prayer

Haunt us; harangue us; hold us, O God.

We, your people, your raggedy Church: ask you to haunt us, harangue us, hold us.

Sometimes we huddle together, clutching our fear to our hearts.

Sometimes we dance together, throwing our arms open wide.

Sometimes we wipe each other's tears; sometimes we offer each other
a cup of cool water to soothe.

Sometimes we ask questions. Sometimes we demand answers.

Sometimes we hold hands and jump together into the unknown.

A lot of times we celebrate and laugh.

All this is prayer.

We offer all this to you, God, and we ask you: haunt us, harangue us, hold us.

Haunt us – with your call to keep going, to reconcile all Creation, to fight against all that would hate and destroy what you love so much.

Harangue us – when we feel too comfortable, when we make excuses, when we simply would rather sleep.

Hold us – in your love, and may we hold each other in that love. Let us become your Beloved Community.

In the face of the questions and challenges of climate crisis, injustice, violence, extinction and fear, hold us in your community of love and hope. Hold us in such a way that we may leap out into the world with courage, determination, good humor, and deep love.

May it be so! Amen!

Part VIII – Sending Forth

When we get serious about the healing of Creation, we stop living smoothly in the world.

Oh all you burrs in the socks, you aggravating stones in the shoes – journey on!

Oh you rough edges and raggedy souls – shine on!

Oh you who are at this moment in tomb-time – hang on!

Oh beloved community:

You who keep trying

You who can't stop crying

You who show us the courage of laughter in the face of frightening times

You who wish you were stronger but still never give up

You who choose every day to be healers and reconcilers of creation,
and you who wish to be so,

You courageous, fearful, insistent, creative, trembling, strong, and imperfect beings:
rough edges and raggedy souls – you, Church – blessed be you!

Now let us continue the work. Together.

Congregational Song We Will Not Keep From Singing

(Tune: How Can I Keep From Singing? Or, Endless Song)

1. When eyes are opened to earth's woes,
And know creation's grieving
God's love empowers us to act
And hope will keep us singing.

Refrain:

*A whole new world may yet be born,
With hope and justice ringing
We'll make the choice and do the work
We will not keep from singing*

2. Should halls of pow'r, control and greed
Say where we should be clinging?
Don't let them tell us who we are
Push back! And keep on singing!

Refrain

3. The work is hard – we won't give up
Together we can do this!
And in this work, we'll celebrate,
And we will keep on singing!

Refrain

4. God calls us all to live as one,
Diverse the gifts we're bringing
To one community of life
That never stops its singing.

Refrain

Closing Instrumental Music/Passing of the Peace

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The directions printed in red should be removed from text printed in a worship bulletin. You may decide whether or not the longer readings by worship leaders should be printed in the bulletin. You may format the bulletin as you see fit, but please do not change the content of the liturgy.

Scripture readings are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Hymns:

Calling – Shaker tune (Joseph Bracket)

Hope and Promise – Tune: Beach Spring

We Will Not Keep From Singing – Tune: Endless Song

Lyrics for these three hymns by Allyson Sawtell – see copyright details below

Breathe on Me, Breath of God – Edwin Hatch; New Century Hymnal (UCC) translation

All of the above hymn tunes are Public Domain

Create in Me, a New Heart, by Stefan Andre Waligur is on the album Blessed are the Peacemakers – [a recording of this piece](#) may be heard on YouTube

Poetry and Responsive Prayer by Allyson Sawtell – see copyright details below



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