

Call to Worship

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases; he redeems my life from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion. (Ps 103-1-4)

Worship in song

Sing hymns and/or worship songs of your choice.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 77:1-15

Prayer of confession

Loving God, when we are met with your love and holiness, we are driven to confess that we are wearied by our sin. We know that whilst you live in a high and holy place, you also live with the humble and contrite. This gives us courage to make this confession.

We confess our lukewarm love of you.

We confess our selfish, wilful ways.

We confess our anger and lack of forgiveness.

To have you turn your face from us is more than we can bear. To be outside your eternal purpose is bleak and terrifying.

Lord, see us as we are and, in your grace, give us your forgiveness and your guidance.

Restore us to your presence and let us live again in your joy, as we live to your glory.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (Jn 3:16-17)

Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving Lord, when we see the world bleeding with pain and violence, help us to remember: you stand outside of time and so guarantee our future.

When we see our youth harassed by anxiety for their future, help them to remember: you stand outside of time and so guarantee their future.

When we suffer the wounds of abuse that so dishonour us, help us to remember: you stand outside of time and so guarantee our future.

When we see the evil triumph and the godly suffer, help us to remember: you stand outside of time and so guarantee their future.

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When we suffer the frustration of delays and failures, help us to remember: you stand outside of time and so guarantee our future.

When we are shattered by the black despair of grief, help us to remember: you stand outside of time and so guarantee our future.

You have already seen the future and revealed it to us. You have given us hope, for you will have the last word. Therefore, we will not be overcome by evil but will praise your name while we wait for you to wipe away our tears.

Holy Communion

During the Bronze Age in the Middle East, the strongest bond that could exist between two people occurred when they agreed to enter into a blood covenant with each other. The ceremony associated with this covenant involved both people cutting their wrists and letting their blood mingle together. The end of the ceremony typically concluded with a covenant meal.

When Jesus ate his last supper with his disciples, he deliberately turned the meal into a covenant meal, a meal that represented the strongest bond possible between two people. However, in this case, it was a covenant between God and humankind. Jesus took a cup of wine and asked them all to drink it. He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28).

God chooses to commit himself to us in covenant. This covenant commitment is so strong that God was prepared to sacrifice himself as Jesus to die to take the blame for our sins so we could be made worthy of life with God. On the cross, Jesus exchanged our sinfulness for his holiness so we could be made right with God.

(Say a prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine which represents the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then share the bread and wine together.)

The Bible Reading

- 2 Corinthians 5:1-20 (selected verses)

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling...and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade people. ...We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

The Message: BE AN AMBASSADOR

You are God's ambassador – and all ambassadors need to know their ABC.

A = Ambassadors carry the authority of God's kingdom

An ambassador carries the authority of the kingdom they represent. In a very real way, they incarnate their home kingdom. They represent its values, its message, its interests and they carry its authority.

As ambassadors of God's kingdom and its ruler Jesus, you do the same. You embody his values; you represent his message, and you carry his authority. Let me read to you from Luke, chapter 9:

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Lk 9:1-2).

We are to represent Christ and be the “aroma of Christ”. The Apostle Paul says: *For we are to God the aroma of Christ (2 Cor 2:15)*. We do not have the mandate to leave any other aroma in our wake than that of Christ. Our mandate is to: *Let your light shine before everyone, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Mt 5:16)*.

Christians, as Christ's ambassadors, also carry his authority.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ... they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (Mk 16:16-18)

Carrying the authority of Christ's kingdom means that, like all ambassadors, we have diplomatic immunity. This means that no power in an alien country has the power to arrest us, imprison us or attack us without their home kingdom allowing it to happen. It means that whilst we are in the kingdom of Satan now, his power is not allowed to have ultimate control over us. He may have the power to afflict us and hurt us for a short time, but we know that he can never have the power to destroy us for ever. Why? – because all ambassadors are fundamentally under the authority of their own king, a king who will eventually recalled them back to his kingdom.

This means that even if we are persecuted and are in chains, even if we are sick with cancer, or pilloried and persecuted for our faith, we are still retain our status as ambassadors. The Apostle Paul wrote from prison where he was in chains saying: *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should (Eph 6:19-20)*.

B = Engaged in the business of his kingdom

Jesus was passionate about one thing only. He was passionate about doing his Father's business. He was passionate about representing the words of his Father, doing the works the Father, and doing both to the glory of his Father. As such, Jesus is the perfect role model for an ambassador. Jesus said: *I have come down from*

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heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (Jn 6:38). He also said: These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me (Jn 14:24).

Ambassadors have no mandate and no other function other than to represent their home kingdom. Similarly, we have no mandate other than to represent Jesus and his kingdom faithfully.

As ambassadors, we have to faithfully represent the message God has given us to share. The Apostle Paul said: *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20).*

As Christ's ambassadors, we live and preach the values of God's kingdom – the kingdom that God will eventually fully unveil. The nature of this ministry was certainly clear to John the Baptist, who was, like us, an ambassador of Jesus. He said: *"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15).* It is a message we need to share with others with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15). As ambassadors, we are sent on the king's business. Listen to what Jesus did: *(Jesus) sent them (his disciples) out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Lk 9:2).*

Because we are ambassadors, it means that if people reject us and our message, they are not rejecting us but are rejecting Jesus who sent us. Jesus made this clear when he said: *"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Lk 10:16).*

Ambassadors know their mandate. They are sent to represent the king's business. Listen to what Jesus said: *But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (Lk 4:34)* We have now been chosen for this role. Jesus said to his disciples: *I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last (Jn 15:16).*

Jesus told his ambassadors (his disciples) to go into the towns and villages and: *Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you' (Lk 10:9).*

Paul needed to remind his young apprentice Timothy to faithfully do his duty as Christ's ambassador. He said: *But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Tim 4:5).*

C = Reflects the culture of his kingdom

The New Testament refers to Christians being 'strangers and aliens' in a land that is not our own. Listen to what the apostle Peter said:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia... (1 Pet 1:1).

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul (1 Pet 2:11).

For so much of their history, God's people were aliens and strangers in a land that was not their own. Why was this the case? God ordained this to be the case in order to teach his people to trust in him alone. Their home and security was to be in their God, not in the country they lived in.

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Because God's people had been aliens for so much of their history, God tells them that this ought to give them a special heart for foreigners who live amongst them. God instructs them in Exodus, chapter 23: *Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt* (Ex 23:9)

The Jews knew that their ancestors were wandering Arameans, and Moses required the Hebrew people to acknowledge this and not forget it when they were eventually allowed to settle in their promised land. Moses instructed them: *Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation* (Deut 26:5).

Ambassadors are displaced but nonetheless belong to their home kingdom. The Apostle Paul said:

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling (2 Cor 5:1-2) ... and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8).

Challenge

Will you pick up your mandate to be Christ's ambassador? What do you need to do in order to know his values and do the ministry he has for you to do? What will you change today to make this happen?

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. (Eph 6:16-18)

This service was prepared for HopeNet SA by Dr Nick Hawkes

Show me the evidence!

Is 1:10-18, 58:1-11

You will need:

A lie detector. Make a simple one by writing a TRUE and NOT TRUE on either end of a piece of cardboard. A colleague hides behind the cardboard with a large cardboard pointer which he/she can use to point to TRUE or NOT TRUE. Tie a piece of string onto the cardboard lie detector (make it about 1 meter long) and tie a button (or something similar) on the other end. (The button is the pretend electrode you put on someone's arm and the string is the wire back to the lie detector.) If you have one, you can put on a deer-stalker hat and pretend you are Sherlock Holmes.

Tell the children that you are doing some detective work today ...and to help you, you have brought in your lie detector which will tell you if people are speaking the truth or not.

Have fun with it. Ask for a volunteer, put the button on their arm and ask them if they like ice cream, pizza, a local well known football team – whatever. If the lie detector gets it wrong, just pretend it is not working very well yet and that it occasionally needs a thump to fix it. Thump it and continue.

Go on to say that you have been given a baffling case to solve as a detective. You have to find out whether this person you are investigating is really a Christian or not.

Ask the children what questions you should ask.

Ensure that the following issues are explored:

- Does going to church mean you love God? Perhaps, but not necessarily.
- Does singing in the church band mean you love God? Perhaps, but not necessarily.
- Does being the worship leader mean you love God? Perhaps, but not necessarily.
- Does obeying God and caring for the poor and making things fair for the needy? Yes! This shows that God's ways matter enough to you to change how you do things.

Read through Isaiah 1:10-18, 58:1-11 and discuss what it teaches. Do this in a way that is appropriate for the age of the children.

(Note: If you want another passage to check out, look up 1 John 4:19-21.)