



# WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR THE RESUMPTION OF IN-PERSON WORSHIP

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*To limit corporate participation, and in keeping with previous recommendations from the Task Force, you may wish to pre-assign written responses (bold type) to an Assisting Minister or other congregational designate.*

## Gathering Liturgy

P: God is our refuge and strength,  
**A very present help in trouble.**

P: Therefore, we will not fear  
**Though the earth should change,  
Though the corona virus has its way.**

P: The God of hosts is with us,  
**The God of Jacob is our refuge.**

*[based on Psalm 46]*

### *At the Font*

P: We gather with gratitude for the land, the air we breathe, and the water that sustains all life;  
We give thanks for the opportunity to gather as community in our place of worship  
where we remember who we are:  
**created in the image of God, Source of life and love,  
joined to Christ in the waters of baptism,  
and set free by the Spirit to be God's healing in the world.**

P: But our hearts are filled with more than gratitude --  
it is not as it was before the pandemic:  
**We come, tentatively, uncertain about our worship practices and the future,  
We know in a new way our deep interconnectedness with all of creation,  
We know better the vulnerabilities of neighbours far and near.**

P: Truthfully, the assurance of Your presence within our breath and body seems distant when we  
cannot sing, or hug the children, or share the peace.  
**Come, Holy Spirit, come.  
Resonate in our bodies.  
Touch our hearts.  
End the virus!**

P: As we cry out and make our prayers this day:  
**Be our refuge and strength,  
Be a very present help in these pandemic days.**

P: Widen our imagination with your large vision  
**Equip us to courageously participate in your very present help,  
to be a refuge and strength in our hurting world.  
Amen.**

## Prayer of the Day

Eternal God, your loving presence has surrounded us throughout this challenging season of pandemic. As we, at long last, re-enter our church buildings and reunite with one another in worship, we pray for your continuing grace, guidance and comfort. Encourage and equip us, give us wisdom and insight, keep our hearts and minds peaceful. Teach us to recognize our safe spaces and liturgies as a powerful witness to our love for our neighbours and one another. As we once again physically gather in your name, however strange and unsettling our new practices may seem at first, help us remember our faithful worship will always be holy, always pleasing to you. All this, and whatever else you see that we need, we ask in the name of Jesus, Immanuel, 'God-with-us'. Amen.

## Prayers of Intercession

As we gather together today in this new way, let us pray for God's grace and peace saying:  
**Spirit of comfort and counsel, mend and mold us for Your healing Reign.**

God of all creation, we look in lament at the many losses tossed about us: missed opportunities, miscarried memories and the many deaths that leave us empty. And yet, we live in hope as we gather differently – believing that You are able to work all things for good. Bring healing to our world, to our bodies, to our church.

**Spirit...**

God in whom we believe, these days we find our faith sorely tested: we wonder how it can be that such illness and brokenness can rifle through the world You call good. And yet You call us to pick up the pieces of our shattered certainty. As we do so, we find in its place a humble faith, which looks to your promised presence in the midst of even Holy Saturday dread.

**Spirit...**

God of righteousness and peace, we are painfully aware that plagues are not just: the elderly, the poor, and the weak have inordinately borne the horror of this novel corona virus. In the face of this injustice You justify a people to work for economic, medical and eco-justice.

**Spirit...**

God of new beginnings, You called out "Samuel!" "Lazareth!" "Saul!" We are listening for our names in this time of turning. We hear creation groaning in labour pains. We see scales at our feet, scales that were once upon our eyes. Holy One, these same feet are now ready to walk anew in the Jesus Way.

**Spirit...**

God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves: we hear your tongue in our prayers, and so listen for You now as we remember the names and needs of those whom we bring to You.

*Prayers from the community for the world, church, community and individuals.*

**Spirit...**

Spirit of grace and peace, You find us in disarray and cloak us in joy; You gather up the shattered pieces that we are and make us to be jubilee; You prepare us to be a people fit for Your healing Reign. Into Your hands....

## Sharing of the Peace

["Peace Be With You"](#) by Trevor Hicks.

**A reflection from the composer:** *I wrote [Peace Be With You] to be a substitute for the physical sharing of the peace. It is designed to be versatile: it can be sung as a solo, as a responsive dialog between cantor and presider, and by a larger ensemble singers, in unison or with the included harmony as the situation permits. I wrote it with piano accompaniment. My thoughts during the pandemic have been that the inevitable changes to worship ought not be looked at as inconvenience, but rather as a time of renewal. In some churches where I have worshipped, I've wondered if the true meaning of the sharing of the peace has been lost and used rather as a time of socializing. I wanted "Peace Be With You" to not only provide a musical sharing of the peace, but also to reiterate what the sharing of the peace means in the liturgy.*

## Thanksgiving at the Table

Loving One, compassionate Three,  
we offer our praise and thanksgiving:  
for your good creation,  
for your presence in our brokenness,  
for the stories of the ancestors,  
and the hope your companionship inspires.

On this day,  
as we (re)turn to you in public worship,  
we remember:  
the coming of Jesus in poverty and oppression,  
the feeding and healing he shared,  
the stories of ordinary things which point us to you,  
and his embrace of the suffering and the dying.

We especially remember  
on a night of betrayal and desertion,  
that Jesus took bread and gave thanks,  
broke it and gave it to those he was with, saying,  
Take and eat; this is my body, broken for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.

And he took the cup after supper,  
again gave thanks,  
and gave it for them to drink saying,  
This is the covenant, renewed in my blood,  
poured out for you and for all,  
for forgiveness and reconciliation.  
Do this in remembrance of me.

Therefore, loving One, compassionate Three,  
we do remember, and we proclaim again:  
his life of service and solidarity,  
his dying and rising,  
and his promise of new life,  
given and renewed each day.

By the coming of your Spirit,  
in this meal, in our gathering, and in every daily interaction:  
strengthen our faith in your promise,  
inspire our grateful response,  
and fire us with hope for the world.

By the promise and presence of Jesus,  
break open our hearts to share the love you are;  
pour us out in service to your hurting world;  
bring creation to fulfillment, and make us new.

We offer these prayers  
in the name of the Loving One,  
trusting the faithfulness of the compassionate Three,  
now and always.  
**Amen.**

## Benediction

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God of grace and mercy,  
of healing and wisdom,  
from the shattered pieces of our changed lives  
you have brought us together as community,  
called and gathered,  
within and beyond the walls of this temple.  
As you guide us through times of uncertainty,  
still you continue to cloak your people with joy and awe.

Send us forth from this place  
to bring light for the world,  
food for the hungry,  
comfort to the sick.

And may your holy presence,  
Father +, Son, and the Holy Spirit  
Keep us, guide us, and bless us  
As we journey forth from this place.  
**Amen.**

## Sending Liturgy

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P: God is our refuge and strength.  
**Amen.**

P: Christ is light for our lives.  
**Amen.**

P: The Spirit of Love is leading us.  
**Amen.**

P: The God of all grace + bless us now and forever.  
**Amen.**

P: Go in peace. Walk humbly with God.  
**Thanks be to God.**

## Reflection – Communion in Amber

On the evening of Saturday, March 14th I sat down to prepare a guest sermon I was to deliver the next day at St. Peter's Church in Kitchener. Writing a sermon this late is unusual for me but I thought it wise to wait, given the rapidly shifting situation of the novel corona virus. Around 8:00 pm I received a call from Pastor Mark Ehlebracht informing me that the service would be cancelled with online worship starting the following week. Nothing has been the same since then. You, of course, have your own memories of that week.

Churches were asked to do the seemingly impossible: gather without gathering. This has taken place across the synod, nation and globe in a variety of formats – live-streamed, recorded, or the sharing of written materials – involving a diversity of content. Some congregations have used Service of the Word, while some have had virtual communion, but all have had to be exceedingly inventive as we gather for worship. People, however, pine to worship face to face in their buildings. This moment is upon us.

We may imagine that our experience of worship in the Amber Stage will be more real than our present virtual worship. But worship upon return will be drastically different from what it was pre-Covid. Some will find the experience of communion in one kind (bread alone) to be disorienting. Many of us will have had that disorienting experience in sharing communion virtually, asking ourselves: is this really communion? In responding to that question, it is important to revisit what Lutherans believe about communion.

First, Communion is a gift and the content of that gift is the presence of Jesus who unites the divine self with us in a tangible, fulsome, and empowering way. However, Lutherans do not understand communion to be necessary for salvation. God in Christ also meets us in the sermon, in baptism, and in the mutual care we offer one another. Communion is, however, empowering, and might be likened to a hug from God, for which many of us ache.

Further, communion is a coming together of a community. When I draw near to God, and you draw near to God, we draw near to one another. Many of us have sorely missed this aspect of communion and look forward to that intimacy of face to face worship.

Communion, in sum, is God's "Yes!" to us. It has been described as a visible word. The gospel word of unconditional love in the sermon is now seen and smelt, tasted and felt in the meal. But we might ask, is this "Yes!" compromised when we only taste one element? When our gathering is distanced? When the hug feels more like a handshake? Will this really be communion?

In answering this question, it is important to look at our past experiences of communion with an honest gaze and ask: Has communion always felt like a gift? Have we always found joy in our sibling at the table? Have we always walked away from the communion rail feeling that we have heard God's "Yes!?" Of course, the answer to these questions is "no." Communion is about relationship and relationships are messy, fractured, and uneven. This is the nature of life.

Our experiences at the altar upon return to churches will be broken, as have been our experiences of virtual worship, as has been our experiences of pre-Covid 19 communion. What makes communion fulsome is not our experience of communion, but God's promise that this meal is "for you." God promises the divine presence in Jesus and with him the presence of our siblings in Christ – those alive and those beyond life in eternal life. This promise is the power of the "Yes!" And Luther was insistent that God's gospel work regularly is done in fractured and broken experiences. This is the surprise of the gospel. What might this mean for a return to Amber Stage worship?

We need to be prepared to be surprised. Things will be different, but difference is not bad. God has written difference into the architecture of creation. Of course, we will lament what we miss but we will also need to dream, imagining how we can make the most of new realities. Such dreaming is only possible when we allow ourselves to fail, knowing that as we explore this strange new world with our hearts open to God and one another, such failure will not be fateful, but rather, faithful to God's "Yes!"

**Episode 1: Let's Go In the Church...Safely!  
At The Entrance to The Church**

[VIDEO: Episode 1](#)

Pastor: Well, it's our first Sunday back in church

Puppet: And I'm sure looking forward to it

Pastor: Great! Happy you're with us

Puppet: Yes, me and lots of my friends!  
A friend I don't even know just yelled  
when he saw this line up outside the church.  
He said "Wow, this is different!"  
I yelled back: "No worries.  
Church is the same, just different!"

Pastor: You are right!  
We are going in to the church to give thanks to God  
and to find ways to love God  
and our neighbour as ourselves!

Puppet: So, it is all the same!  
I mean ... it is still all about love!  
Because we love each other  
and want everyone to be safe and healthy  
we do things a little differently.

Pastor: That's right!  
We keep a safe distance  
between ourselves and others at all times.

Puppet: That means staying  
about a moose length away from others.  
Or ... maybe ... 2 big dogs in a row.  
What do you think?

Pastor: A moose length  
or two big dogs in a row  
sounds about right!  
We go in to church and sign up  
to let them know we are here.

Puppet: That way if anyone gets sick  
we can let everyone know  
and they can be extra careful.  
Just like we would,  
if we were playing and got sick the next day.  
We would let our friends know!  
But we will put on our masks now  
to do our best to keep safe!  
Masks on everybody!

Pastor: Masks on! And into the church we go!

**Episode 2: Getting Ready to Worship  
In The Sanctuary**

[VIDEO: Episode 2](#)

Pastor: Now, we each get a bulletin.  
Some churches have screens  
so they do not need a bulletin.

Puppet: **Well, we sure do!  
Someone has taken all the red books OUT!  
What are we going to do now?**

Pastor: No worries!  
Everything we need is printed in the bulletin.

Puppet: **And it looks like our friend, the usher  
is going to find a seat for us.  
Uh-oh, our usual pew has tape across it.**

Pastor: That is because we need  
to keep that safe one moose distance  
between ourselves and others at all times.

Puppet: **Well, it won't be my same seat but it will be just fine!  
See, the Smiths are sitting over there  
where they have never been before.  
And they are waving!  
This is kind of fun! Doing something new!**

Pastor: Let's follow the usher now!  
Remember no high fives to our friends or hugging!  
You could give your very best wave, though.



*Music Playing*

**Puppet: Psst, Pastor Ed!**

Pastor: Yes? What is it?

**Puppet: I love the music. It is wonderful!  
But no one is singing!  
The service has started, but we are not singing.**

Pastor: I know.  
That is because when we sing,  
we really express ourselves ... almost as much as sneezing.

**Puppet: Well, not me!  
I am a quiet kind of a singer.  
But mom and dad love to sing really loud!**

Pastor: So for now, we are not singing except in our hearts.

**Puppet: There is something else ...**

Pastor: What is that?

**Puppet: There is no critter and kid time with the pastor!  
We do not get to go up front!  
Are we going to have to stay in the pew for the whole service?**

Pastor: We are staying that moose distance the whole service!  
But there is some good news ...

**Puppet: There is always good news, Pastor Ed!  
That is what the gospel is!  
It is the Good News that God loves us just the way we are.**

Pastor: That's right!  
But the good news about staying in our seats  
is that we won't have to do so for quite so long ...

**Puppet: The service is shorter?**

Pastor: Yes, without hymns and a few other things,  
the service is shorter.  
And right now shorter means healthier!

**Puppet: I have always said that!**

Pastor: Because shorter is healthier for us  
the service will be shorter than usual.

**Puppet: We can do shorter!  
No worries, Pastor Ed!  
Time to listen to those people up front.  
I want to hear about God's love!**

**Puppet:** I am happy now!

**Pastor:** Me, too!

**Puppet:** I love sharing this meal with Jesus!

**Pastor:** Me, too. I missed it a lot!

**Puppet:** Speaking of missing ...  
The big cup and those little glasses are gone! Vanished!  
There will be no wine or grape juice!  
Nothing to drink!

**Pastor:** Again, not to worry!  
It is all good! Drinks are good and useful.  
We need water to live.  
Lunch is usually a sandwich and a drink, right?

**Puppet:** Right ... That is what I mean!

**Pastor:** But you do not say you have missed lunch  
when you have had a sandwich only.

**Puppet:** So, it is the same, just different.

**Pastor:** Yes, Bishop Susan and Bishop Michael  
and in fact, everyone says it is just fine this way.  
Jesus gives us all we need in the bread or in the wine.  
And bread is just safer.

**Puppet:** Well, can I take my mask off now  
so I can eat the wafer?

**Pastor:** We will wait till after the pastor gives us the wafer  
and walk a moose distance away.  
*Then* we can lift up the mask and eat the wafer.  
And right after we put the mask back on again!

**Puppet:** Gotchal

**Puppet:** Whoa! ... Hold on a minute!

**Pastor:** What is the matter?

**Puppet:** There is no snack time!  
No meet and greet!  
No fellowship time!  
No coffee hour!  
And we are going out the wrong door.  
I am going to miss those treats,  
especially the chocolate ones ... and my friends

**Pastor:** I know!  
We leave through a different door.  
This is all so that we can stay safe!

**Puppet:** Like I said, it is the same but different!  
I got to feel Jesus' love and the love of everyone here.  
I would like to give them a hug ...just like before  
but better to be safe!  
Being safe is being loving!

**Pastor:** It was wonderful to see everyone  
and to be back in church.  
And we worshipped in a way that is loving!

**Puppet:** It was great to be back!  
I am going to wave good bye now.  
I will catch my friends later!

**Pastor:** You will?

**Puppet:** Yes, we critters are on-line too!  
How do you think we connect with our grandparents?  
We face-time with them!  
That way they are safe and we are too!

**Pastor:** How do we end this?

**Puppet:** We say "Thanks be to God!"  
Time to take off our masks and head home!  
What's for lunch?

## Acknowledgements

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