

## E3:Y3 Service without Sermon

### Prelude:

### Welcome & Introduction

Today we come together to worship and continue to explore what it means to encounter, embrace and embody Christ in the world. To me, this has always felt like a natural progression:

- Before we can embody Christ, we have to have Christ revealed to us—whether that is growing up in a Christian environment, reading/hearing the Word, feeling that ah-ha moment of a higher power in creation or art, experiencing love from another person, laughing out loud.
  - Sometimes it's just the super simple stuff and the moments of mindfulness. *Yesterday when I watched water go down the drain, such a simple everyday thing and yet, I was struck by wonder that is water. How often do we stop to think about water? What is it and what it does? How often do we stop and feel gratitude for the water we have? How often do we stop and recognise the goodness of water, and by extension, the goodness of God?*
- Once our curiosity has been sparked and we begin on a journey of seeking this Christ, we, perhaps even unconsciously, begin to value the things that Christ values, we begin to embrace Kingdom ways, seeking peace and love, true wisdom, order out of chaos, purpose, etc. This shapes our identity, the person we are at our core. You may choose to think of it as embracing who we were created to be.
- What we truly believe determines what we think, how we process, how we see others, how we speak and act. This is embodying Christ. This is what 2 Corinthians 5 means when we read that we are called to be ambassadors. Jesus often said, "when you see Me, you have seen the Father". It is our hope that we can say, with humility and grace for when we fall short, "when you see me, you have seen Jesus".

To me, it has always been a problem to try to jump straight to the "embody" part of the equation. It only leads to feelings of guilt instead of joy, a doing of works out of duty instead of zeal. This is not a process to be rushed but pursued daily --as we attempt to understand God's deep love for us and to respond honestly.

Our service today is an interactive offering of readings, prayers, songs and storytelling arranged in 3 sections: encounter, embrace & embody. Thank you to all our participants this morning. I encourage us to take our time processing what we hear and say, making ourselves open to the voice of God this morning.

## Encounter

Where do we meet God?

Call to Worship #855

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L: To worship is to stand in awe under a heaven of stars,  
before a flower, a leaf in sunlight, or a grain of sand.

P: To worship is to be silent, receptive,  
before a tree astir with the wind, or the passing shadow of a cloud.

L: To worship is to work with dedication and with skill;  
it is to pause from work and listen to a strain of music.

P: To worship is to sing with the sing beauty of the earth;  
it is to listen through a storm to the still small voice within.

All: Worship is the mystery within us  
reaching out to the Mystery beyond.

- Let us pray together (#911)  
©Ulrich Zwingli (present-day Switzerland), 16<sup>th</sup> century

Speak to us, living God,  
and by the power of your Spirit, help us to hear your holy word,  
that we may truly understand; that, understanding, we may believe;  
and believing, we may follow in faithfulness and obedience,  
seeking your honor and glory in all that we do, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Song: VT 30 - Jesus Calls Us

Alternatively: [VT175 Planets Humming](#) or [VT161 I Sought the Lord](#)

Children's time—talk about seeing God in everything

Read: "God is Love" by Amy Parker, followed by a prayer of blessing

Alternatively: ["What is God Like"](#) by Rachel Held Evans, ["This I Know"](#) by Clay Anderson or ["When God Made the World"](#) by Matthew Paul Turner

Scripture: (Reader #1)

God is in all and through all, and if we open ourselves, we will see God.

We read in Ephesians 4:4-6 For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

And Psalm 139:7-10 says: I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

Here are just some of my thoughts I had about how and where we encounter God in big and small ways (see bulletin insert/handout):

- Creation
- Scripture
- Prayer and Meditation
- The arts—music, artwork, architecture, etc.
- Community, Family, Parenting, Relationships
- New ideas

How do these encounters and experiences translate into a “knowing” and a “becoming”?

You may have gone for a walk in the mountains or in the early morning. And you may have taken a deep breath and experienced a connectedness or a sense of well-being. This peace may have steered you toward some sort of epiphany or “knowing”. Maybe you thought: I feel good, nature is good, I am part of this morning, part of my surroundings, I am part of an interchange and an interdependence on what is around me. Maybe you thought: this world is amazing, there is an order to it, not an accident, maybe there is a Creator. If so, this Creator must be good, this Creator creates good things, this Creator must love the results of their labor. I am part of that, the Creator must love me too. And then: I am beloved, I am of value. And then, I can create love and goodness too. This could all happen in an instant, and yet you’ve engaged in different ways of knowing that have begun to alter your self-identity.

I’ve heard of 8 different kinds of knowing:

- Language
- Sense perception
- Emotion
- Reason
- Imagination
- Faith
- Intuition
- Memory

Each of these ways of knowledge have validity and power, although they are not simple, and often require thoughtfulness and evaluation as well. But it serves us well to realize that we are complex beings with more than one way of understanding things. It is important for us to open ourselves up to new ways and important to extend grace and humility when hearing other people’s experiences.

Storytelling: Storyteller #1--short sharing (5minutes or less) about encountering Christ in the world

*Example: For myself, almost 3 years ago, when I was part of MCA's visioning process, as many of us were, we had communion as a body of believers. Betty Pries led us in a communion service where we sang these words over and over again: "We become what we receive." Although it felt a little out of my comfort zone, I engaged in what she asked, closed my eyes and repeated that refrain again and again. As I did so, I had a vision of Jesus standing at the front of the sanctuary extending his hand. I say vision, but what does that mean? Was it my imagination? Was it just what I thought those words meant? But I realized of how much Jesus loved me, loves all of us, extending his hand in invitation, love and blessing. And I saw myself accepting that hand.*

*Now, any psychologist would tell you that in order to extend kindness and grace to others, kindness and grace must have been extended to you; to show perseverance or strength in adversity, that also would have had to been modelled for you; and to give love, you must have experienced love. So, in that image of accepting the invitation of grace and love from Jesus, I saw myself standing next to Jesus and extending my hand as well.*

*I wrote that experience down because I didn't want to forget it. I have long since forgotten where I put that paper, but that understanding, that knowing that I received in that moment has not be forgotten.*

*So it is when I hear the words about being an ambassador for Christ, that I know it has nothing to do with me and my ego, but only of the love of Jesus and the identity I have in Him, and the power of the Spirit flowing from God to others through me as a conduit. I am far from perfect, who is? But we can allow ourselves to know, understand and be changed, rearranged, willing to be ambassadors, trusting God will work God-mysteries through us, and that some small God-light will shine through our words and actions. We can attempt to make small choices daily in how we react to the words and actions of others; we can determine to keep growing and extending grace to ourselves and others; we can choose how we allot our finances, how we spend our spare time; and we can work on practising the pause more often.*

## **Embrace**

How do we re-form our identity in Christ?

Betty Pries, at the conclusion of MC AB's visioning process, shared a visual image with us. Picture an outline of a person, but more like a gingerbread man outline, and at the center where we might draw a heart, she drew a little house.

At the core of who we are, where God made us in God's image—that is what she called the God-house, the God-spark, and what we might call our true identity. Many of us, most of us if we're being honest, live and find our identity closer to the skin: what we look like, what we accomplish, how much money we make, how many friends we have, how smart we are, how athletic, etc. But Betty explained that the closer we move our identity to the God-house, the more peace and joy we find; the more we seek to find our identity in Christ, the more we are our true, God-created selves.

We draw closer to the God-house when we engage in spiritual disciplines and when we choose to encounter Christ deliberately in daily situations, re-aligning and re-orienting ourselves, thereby creating brain pathways that turn to God first in any situation.

This is the "embracing" that needs to happen before we can "embody" Christ.

Confession/affirmation #888

©based on Luke 11:9-10; Romans 8:14; @ Corinthians 5:17; Presbyterian Church (USA), Book of Common Worship, 2018

Confession is one spiritual discipline that can help us develop humility, perspective and grace; and in return, God's promises give us the assurance that we are deeply loved and valued.

L: Friends in Christ,  
God knows our needs before we ask  
And in our asking prepares us to receive the gift of grace.  
We open our lives to God's healing presence,  
seeking peace with God and reconciliation with our neighbors.  
We are mindful not only of personal evil  
but also of our communal sins of family, class, race, and nation.  
We confess to God whatever has wounded us or brought injury to  
others,  
that we may receive mercy and become for each other ministers of  
God's grace.

***silence***

L: Hear the good news!  
Who is in a position to condemn?  
Only Christ, and Christ died for us,  
Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us,  
Christ prays for us.

**P: Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.  
The old life has gone; a new life has begun.**

L: Know that you are forgiven, and be at peace.

**P: Amen.**

Scripture: (Reader #2)

If we ever wonder what it is we are called to embrace and to love, we can turn to Galatians 5:22-25 which says:

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

## Storytelling

- Storyteller #2--short sharing (5minutes or less) about embracing Christ in the world
- community sharing - inviting God into our circumstances

## Prayer: #976

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Great Physician, You touched the lives of the sick and the troubled;  
Your hands rested on bodies in crisis; Your words soothed broken hearts.  
We call on you today, O God, because we need your healing.  
Where we have pain, bring relief.  
When we are disoriented, bring clarity.  
When we confront disease or brokenness, bring healing.  
When we wait for tests or news, bring patience.  
When we live with barriers, bring courage.  
When we are bound by addiction, bring freedom  
When illness separates us from others, bring friendship.  
When we cannot make ends meet, help us.  
You are with us in loneliness, bringing comfort.  
You are with us in despair, bring hope.  
You are the God who cares and heals.

Song: VT 542 - Christ Calls to Me

Alternatively: [VT420 God of the Bible](#), [VT584 Jesus Be the Center](#), [VT740 Spirit of the Living Go](#) or [VT298 What is the World Like](#)

## **Embody**

What might it look like when we live out God's love?

Scripture: *(Reader #3)*

Let us turn to Ephesians 4:32-5:2 to see what Christ-in-us looks like.

Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us.

Prayer of St. Francis #991 *(Reader #4)*

©attr. *Francis of Assis (Italy) ca. 13<sup>th</sup> century*

God, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith,

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light,

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Spirit, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Offertory #1015

©*First University United Methodist Church (USA) 1969*

Generous God, you gave us life; now we give our lives back to you.

We present ourselves: our work and play, our joys and sorrows,

our thoughts and deeds, our gifts and resources,

to be used by you for the sake of all people everywhere,

through Jesus Christ. Amen.



Scripture: (Reader #3)

We are God's ambassadors

Ephesians 2:10 says: For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

And 1 Peter 2:9 says: For you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

Song: VT 545 - Here I Am Lord

Alternatively: [VT568 Christ Has No Body Here but Ours](#) or [VT297 You are Salt of the Earth](#)

Scripture: (Reader #3) How do we live as disciples? In Romans 12:6-8 it says:

In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Storytelling: Storyteller #3--short sharing (5minutes or less) about embodying Christ in the world

If time:

- Open mike (today or future Sundays)
- Commitment Cards & Bucket List Ideas

### **Prayer of Blessing #922**

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We are not alone; we live in God's world.

We believe in God: who has created and is creating,  
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new,  
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence,  
to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others,  
to seek justice and resist evil,  
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

## Announcements

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## Sending #1050

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L: From where we are to where you need us:

**All: Jesus, now lead on.**

L: From the familiarity of what we know to the wonder of what you will reveal:

**All: Jesus, now lead on.**

L: To transform the fabric of this world until it resembles the shape of your kingdom:

**All: Jesus, now lead on.**

L: Because good things have been prepared for those who love God:

**All: Jesus, now lead on.**

**Song:** VT 581 - Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song

## Postlude

Thank you to Laura Wiebe and Trinity Mennonite Church for sharing this service option.