

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Annual Conference 2013

CWZepp

SATURDAY EVENING

Call to Prayer 2nd Chronicles 7:14-15 (NRSV)

¹⁴ if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. ¹⁵ Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.

Interpretive Dance to “Grace and Love” by Kutless

Invitation to the Discipline of Silence

Throughout our time together here in Charlotte, we will be invited to join in the spiritual discipline of silence for a few moments during each of our worship gatherings. In these moments, may we seek to quiet not only our voices but also our bodies, our minds, and our hearts, that we might seek the face of God together, and humbling ourselves, yield to the Spirit of God moving in our midst.

Let us continue in silent prayer... *(30 seconds or so)*

Spoken Prayer

Gracious and Loving God, here we are.
We have come from near and far
to be together here
in this place, in this time

For some of us, the coming days
will bring together weeks and months
and even years of preparation.
Others of us have barely thought about
Conference before our arrival in Charlotte.
For many of us,
this has already been a long and full day –
a day of travel, of last minute preparations,
of finding our way in an unfamiliar place,
of meeting new people
and embracing old friends.

And for some, the day is far from over,
and the night promises but little rest
and an early wake up call.

But no matter where we are coming from,
and no matter how ready we are for this conference,
Regardless of whether we are tired and weary
or excited and bursting with energy,
In these moments of silence and prayer,
as we quiet our voices and open our hearts
as we seek your face together,
We are the same.

For even as we breathe the same air,
so we are bathed in the same Spirit.
Even as our bodies are comprised of the
same dust,
so our souls are free by the same grace and love.
And even as we have all sinned and all fallen short of your glory,
so we are all blessed by your great faithfulness, mercy and love...

Gracious and Loving God,
it is good to be here.
May all we do and all we say here
bring glory to you,
good to our neighbors,
and peace to our souls.

Amen.

Anthem *Great is thy faithfulness*

SUNDAY MORNING

Call to Prayer

Sometimes we make the mistake of believing that we can only pray in one way – with head bowed, or knees bent, or hands raised. But as we were reminded as we began our worship, every breath, every action, and every movement can be an act of worship and a posture of prayer. In that spirit, you are invited now to enter this time of prayer in whatever posture or position you feel led and appropriate. Perhaps you will want to accept our Moderator’s invitation from last night to “look up, reach out, and kneel down.” Or if you just feel the need to stretch your legs, please feel free to stand and pray on your feet. If you feel most prayerful on your knees or with head bowed, or if prayer for you is most authentic with hands raised or eyes open and uplifted, please feel free to pray now in such a manner.

Let us now each move into the posture of prayer that is most fitting to us right now, and then quiet our hearts as we come before the God who has made each of us in all our uniqueness.

Silence

(30 seconds or so)

Spoken Prayer

Gracious and everlasting God, in these moments of quiet – whether we sit or stand or kneel, whether we fold or raise or hold out open hands, whether we close or cover or open our eyes – we come to you now in humility, confessing that we are not all that we want to be, or all that you would have us to be. In the silence, we cannot ignore the disconnect between your steadfast, sure love for us, and our hesitant, faltering, feeble commitment to your way; between the abiding and enduring covenant you have made with your people, and our own fleeting faithfulness.

For while you have told us to be still and know that you are God, we have been busy and hurried – rushing about from one thing to another. While you have invited us to consider the lilies and not to worry about tomorrow, we have invested in bigger houses and barns and purchased insurance to protect our hoped-for tomorrows. While you have instructed us to go and bear much fruit, we have stayed and studied for our final exam at the University of the Pearly Gates. While you have commanded us to love you with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves, we have proven time and again that our priorities, allegiances, and loves are out of order.

But God, we come to you now also in assurance, knowing that you have searched us and known us; that as far as the east is from the west, so far you remove our transgressions from

us; that the Spirit helps us in our weakness; and that you will not leave us or forsake us but will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

And so we offer now to you our thanks, for the amazing grace and the abundant love you offer to us, as freely as rain falls upon the earth. May they not be in vain, but may your grace lead us to be more gracious, and may your steadfast love enable us to more truly love one another. May it be so, in Christ's name – Amen.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Call to Prayer

We have heard the promise – *a new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you.*
And we have heard the appeal – *Come, Holy Spirit, come and fill us up!*

So let us now pray, in the hope and expectation that it shall come to pass...

Silence

(30 seconds or so)

Spoken Prayer

O God, too often we come to you already full –
full of worries and anxieties,
full of plans and ideas,
full of doubts and uncertainties,
full of pride and satisfaction.

Too often, Lord, we come to you
without expecting much – praying with little hope
that you will answer,
that things can be different
that we can count on anyone or anything but
ourselves.

Too often, God, we come to you
only when we've exhausted other possibilities –
when our plans have failed,
when our hopes have been dashed,
when our pride has been shattered.

Forgive us Lord, for being full – of our selves.
Forgive us for failing to make room for you
in our hearts, our minds, and our lives.
Forgive us, for not seeking you first.

Give us now new hearts as you have promised.
Fill us up with your spirit.
Let us come now to you as we ought –
with open hearts, open minds, open spirits.
Let us seek you seek you first,
And let us pray as Jesus taught us...

***Prayer in Song** *The Lord's Prayer*

SUNDAY EVENING – CONCERT OF PRAYER

Restoration Prayer from the Lectern

O God, we know that it is good and pleasant when your people live together in unity. But we confess that there has been and there is brokenness among us. And so Lord, where there is bitterness and anger

Where there is distrust and suspicion

Where there is discord and conflict

Where there is hostility and division

We pray for healing and reconciliation,

and for a right spirit to be restored in us,

that your kingdom might come among us,

and your will be done among us and through us,

and not in spite of us.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

MONDAY EVENING

***Hymn** *Bring Many Names*

Call to Prayer

Each of us comes with unique experiences of the divine, and thus we know God in different ways. As we quiet our hearts now in prayer, let us each silently call upon God by the name or the names by which we know God best, knowing that together we will bring many names, all of which point to the same ultimate reality that, collectively, we call God.

Silence

(1 minute or so)

Spoken Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
 Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.
 Abba, Logos, Ruach.

By these names, O God, we have been taught to know you.
 And so with these metaphors, we have sought to understand you.
 In these triune forms, we have seen you in a multitude of ways.

Often, they help us. They help us to see you. They help us to know you. They help us to give voice to our experiences with you.

But Lord, sometimes they also get in the way. Sometimes they raise more questions than answers. Sometimes they hurt us in deep places. Sometimes they trap us in conceptual paradigms that are no longer meaningful for us. Sometimes they just don't make sense.

Ultimately, regardless of whatever name or names we use to call, you remain a mystery to us.
 For now, we can only see you dimly.
 For now, we can know you only in part.
 For now, we can only know that you are.

But these things we also believe:

That you, Father God, created us – fashioning us in our mother’s womb – and that you are the ground of our very being.

That you, Brother Jesus, show us the way to abundant and everlasting life – life that is truly life.

That you, Holy Spirit, are as close to us as our very breath, and that you comfort and sustain us along the way.

And that even as we call you by many and different names, you know each of us by our own names, and have called each of us “Beloved.”

And that, Lord, is enough for us to know. For all the rest, we pray only that you would give us the faith to accept the Living Water which Jesus offers, and to drink deeply from the mystery and the depth of that well.

Amen.

Anthem *Give Me a Vessel*

TUESDAY EVENING

Call to Prayer

Once, when the prophet Elijah was at the end of his rope, fleeing from Jezebel, and wishing for his life to be over, the word of the Lord came to him and led him to the top of Mount Horeb, to wait for YHWH to pass by. So we read in 1st Kings 19:11-12, “Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.”

And in that silence, Elijah heard God’s voice.

In silence, may we be attentive to the Lord moving in our midst...

Silence

(1 minute or so)

Spoken Prayer

God of all Life and God of all Love,

It is easy to say that we believe in a God that is Love. But it is a far different thing to live in love, as Christ loved us.

Yes, sometimes our hearts do overflow with love for our family and friends, our neighbors and even our enemies; but at other times our attempts to love feel strained or contrived, or can’t even make it out of the gate.

Sometimes we are touched and sustained by the love offered to us by others; other times the love that others try to offer feels frayed and damaged, or something that is very different than what we believe love should be.

Sometimes we can almost feel the warm embrace of your love; at other times your love feels distant or unreal, or too good to be true for people like us.

O God for all those times when love is close and real and palpable, we give you thanks.

But God, when love is less than we'd like it to be, when love seems far off, unreachable, and impossible to believe, when our anger gets the best of us and harsh words escape from us, give us the strength to quiet our hearts long enough to bring them to the edge of your embrace, where you can touch us and fill us, where you can transform our bitterness and wrangling and malice into kindness and tenderheartedness and forgiveness, where you can make us whole – both as individuals and as members of one another in the body.

We pray in the name of the one who was Love incarnate, who calls us to live in love, even as we have been loved. Amen.

Anthem *Rain Down on Me*

WEDNESDAY MORNING

***Hymn** *God of This City*

Call to Prayer

Indeed, there is no one like our God.
Therefore let us be still, and know that God is God.

Silence

(1 minute or so)

Spoken Prayer

Light in the darkness,
Hope for the hopeless,
Peace for the restless,

O God, you have promised to be all of these things to us. But not just to us. You have promised these to all. Not only to a select few. Not only to the faithful. Not only to the righteous. To all.

And so God, we hear your call to be bearers of this good news of Jesus Christ – to follow him to wherever there are people who are alone or angry or addicted or abandoned; to join him in proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to unite with him in bringing freedom to the oppressed and heralding the age of your favor.

O God we know that the harvest is great, and the workers few.
And we know that greater things are yet to come,
and greater things are still to be done.

So we pray that by your grace, and by your love, and by your spirit moving not only in our midst but also through us, that we might be a part of it all, and that we might continue the work of Jesus not only in this city and this conference, but beyond, in our families and our congregations, in our communities and our nation, and indeed in all the world.

We pray in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, Amen.

Scripture Reading Ephesians 2