

# Experiencing the Sabbath Gifts

La Sierra University Church of Seventh-day Adventists • Riverside, California • July 2009

## To Our Guests

The Early Church liturgical service, is now in its sixteenth year as a contemporary Seventh-day Adventist expression of a historic pattern of Christian worship. Its focus is Scripture, thoughtfully heard and prayerfully received. Its style is participatory, involving the congregation throughout the service. Its spirit is contemplative, including frequent periods of silence for reflection and prayer.

The Scripture readings for each Sabbath are selected according to the Revised Common Lectionary, a widely used schedule of texts that represents the whole range of Scripture over the course of three years (we are currently in Year B). At the same time, each year recognizes the traditional Christian seasons, reflecting the mission of Jesus.

In our service the homily, a brief meditation on one or more of the Scripture readings, is important but not dominant. Like other participants in the service, our homilists include the pastors of the church, members of the congregation, university faculty and staff, and occasional guests.

In addition to materials from various traditional and contemporary worship resources, this liturgy draws on the content and language of *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951, 2005). The hymn numbers refer to the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985); the words are adapted from *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995). The text of the Lord's Prayer is adapted from the New Revised Standard Version.

## Preparing

Before the service begins and during the organ prelude we have an opportunity to savor two short Sabbath poems from *A Timbered Choir* by Wendell Berry:

Best of any song  
is bird song  
in the quiet, but first  
you must have the quiet.

There is a day  
when the road neither  
comes nor goes, and the way  
is not a way but a place.

## Inviting

The pastoral host says:

The power of God the Source of all that is,  
the truth of God the incarnate Word,  
and the peace of God the Guide of our lives  
are with you this Sabbath day.

We join in reading the bold type.

**And also with you.**

The pastoral host may express our shared concerns  
as appropriate, and then says:

This is the day our God has made!

Let us be glad and rejoice in it!

**God is gracious.**

**God's love is forever.**

We stand and join in singing these words  
to the tune of hymn 393 (Park Street):

**God of the Sabbath and its light,  
we love your hallowed day of rest.  
It is the happy soul's delight,  
the comfort of the careworn breast,  
the comfort of the careworn breast.**

The cantor sings a second stanza:

O sacred day of grace and joy,  
freedom from all the work we do,  
May now no troubled thoughts destroy  
the peacefulness we find in you.  
the peacefulness we find in you.

We join in singing a third stanza:

**Creator let us ever know  
your presence with this day of rest.  
Thus will your people always grow,  
finding the Sabbath doubly blest,  
finding the Sabbath doubly blest,**

We remain standing as the pastor leads in prayer:

Holy God, in your overflowing love,  
you created all things.

**Through Jesus Christ your unique Son  
you revealed your salvation to the world.**

Through your Spirit, our constant Companion  
you give us a share in your life and love.

**In this holy time and special place,  
fill us with a vision of your goodness,**

so that we may always serve and praise  
your unconditional, universal, unending love.

**Amen**

*Please be seated.*

### *Receiving*

*The service leader begins:*

Where shall the likeness of God be found?

**There is not enough freedom  
on the top of a mountain  
nor enough depth in the silence of the sea.**

Yet the likeness of God can be found in a day,  
in Sabbath time, which is eternity in disguise.

**Let us receive the gift of Sabbath time.**

One cannot operate on a brain with a shovel;  
the Sabbath is not an occasion for frivolity.

**Labor without dignity is the cause of misery.**

Rest without spirit is the source of depravity.

**Let us receive the gift of the Sabbath spirit.**

The Sabbath is a profound harmony with all creation,  
a sympathy for all things.

**The Sabbath is the unity of what is below  
and what is above –**

the happiness of the universe.

**Let us receive the gift of Sabbath happiness.**

Without the Sabbath we know only ourselves,  
or God distorted as a thing or an abyss.

**The Sabbath is a window into eternity,**

a vision of the likeness of the divine.

**Let us receive the gift of Sabbath vision.**

There is a word that is seldom said,  
a word for an emotion almost too deep  
to be expressed –

**the love of the Sabbath –**

as if God's people were in love with the seventh day.

**Let us receive the gift of Sabbath love.**

### *Praying*

*The service leader continues:*

If we say we have no sin,  
we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us..

**But if we confess our sins,  
God who is faithful and right will forgive our sins  
and cleanse us from unrighteousness.**

O God, our sins are too heavy to carry,  
too real to hide, and too deep to undo.

**Forgive what our lips tremble to name,  
what our hearts can no longer bear,  
what has become for us  
a consuming fire of judgment.**

On this Sabbath day,  
free us from a past we cannot change.

**Open us to a future we can change,  
and in which we can be changed.**

Grant us grace to grow more and more  
into the fullness of your love.

**Amen.**

*The cantor sings one stanza of hymn 547 (Slane):*

Be now my vision, O God of my heart.  
nothing surpasses the love you impart –  
You my best thought, by day and by night,  
waking or sleeping, your presence my light.

*We join in singing a second stanza:*

**Be now my wisdom, and be my true word,  
ever within me, my soul is assured.  
Mother and Father, you are both to me;  
now and forever your child I will be.**

*The service leader says:*

May the God of mercy who forgives our sins  
strengthen us in all goodness and keep us secure.

**Amen.**

*The service leader may remind the congregation  
of special blessings and special needs, and then says:*

I invite you to kneel  
and join in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come and your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
are yours now and forever. Amen.**

For your church – its ministers and all its people –  
that in faithful witness  
they may proclaim and live the gospel,

**we pray to you, O God.**

*We pray in silence.*

For those who do not yet believe  
and for those who no longer believe,  
that they may see, hear, and receive  
the reality of your love,

**we pray to you, O God.**

*We pray in silence.*

For our troubled and bleeding world,  
that a spirit of respect and forbearance  
may grow among peoples and nations,

**we pray to you, O God.**

*We pray in silence.*

For the homeless, the hungry, and all who suffer,  
that they may be relieved and comforted,

**we pray to you, O God.**

*We pray in silence.*

Knowing your infinite love in Christ  
we entrust to you, O God,  
ourselves, one another, and all of life

**Amen.**

*We sit.*

## *Listening*

*The service leader prays:*

Living, loving God, help us again today  
so to hear your Word in the human words  
that we may truly understand,  
and understanding, believe;  
and believing, live in gratitude, faithfulness,  
and generosity.

**Amen.**

*The first reader says:*

Listen for the word of God in the words of the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Book of Samuel, chapter \_\_\_, verses \_\_\_ to \_\_\_.

**We are listening.**

*After the reading:*

This ends the reading.

**Thanks be to God for these words!**

*After a period of silent reflection, the pastor says:*

Please join me in reading responsively from  
Psalm \_\_\_, as printed on the sheet you received  
with your printed liturgy.

*After a period of silent reflection, the second reader says:*

Listen for the word of God in the words of \_\_\_\_\_,  
chapter \_\_\_, verses \_\_\_ to \_\_\_.

**We are listening.**

*After the reading:*

This ends the reading.

**Thanks be to God for these words!**

*After a period of silent reflection, the cantor sings  
one stanza to the tune of hymn 481 (Rest):*

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above!  
There Jesus met you prayerfully:  
The silence of eternity  
interpreted by love.

*The congregations sings another stanza:*

**Breathe through the pulses of desire  
your coolness and your balm.  
Let sense be numb, let flesh retire,  
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm.**

*The service leader says:*

I invite you to stand to hear the Gospel.

Listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to  
\_\_\_\_\_, chapter \_\_\_, verses \_\_\_ to \_\_\_.

**We are listening.**

*After the reading, the service leader says:*

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!

**Thanks be to God for the gospel.**

*We sit and reflect on the Gospel.*

## *Giving*

*The service leader prays:*

God of all creation, through your goodness  
we have these gifts to share this Sabbath morning.

**Accept us and our offerings  
and use them for your work in the world.**

*The ushers receive the offering.*

*After the offering, the cantor says:*

I invite you to stand and join in singing hymn \_\_\_\_\_,

*After the hymn, we remain standing.*

## Considering

*The homilist prays:*

God be in my head, and in my thinking.  
God be in my heart, and in my understanding.  
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking.

**Amen.**

*We sut.*

*The homilist expounds one or more  
of the scripture readings.*

## Affirming

*After a period of silent reflection, the service leader says:*

I invite you to stand as we affirm our Christian faith.  
We believe in God the Creator of heaven and earth.

**God is almighty in love,  
always accessible to humanity  
and radically unwilling to abandon sinners.**

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's unique Son.

**Born of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
he grew to adulthood, was baptized by John,  
and spoke and lived the good news of God's love.**

He suffered, died, and was buried.

**Coming forth from the grave on the third day,  
he was seen by many witnesses  
and ascended into heaven.**

He is now at the right hand of God,  
ministering grace for our benefit.

**He will come again in glory  
as Judge and Savior of all humanity.**

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
our Companion and Guide.

**The Spirit is God's living presence  
and transforming power,**

the source of our oneness in Christ,  
the inspiration of our witness and service,

**and the promise of everlasting life.**

*We join in singing a stanza of hymn 16  
(Old Hundredth):*

**Proclaim aloud that God is good,  
whose mercy is forever sure,  
Whose truth at all times firmly stood  
and shall from age to age endure.**

*We remain standing.*

## Reflecting

*The pastor says:*

May the Word who still creates new reality,  
and the Spirit who breathes life into our world,  
fill our lives with new possibilities  
as we live and love and grow and serve  
in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

**Alleluia! Amen.**

*After the organ chimes, please be seated for silent prayer and  
meditation throughout the postlude.*

## Blessing

*After the postlude the pastor says:*

May the gifts of this Sabbath remain with us  
so that we may live as Jesus lived –  
to bless others with God's love.

**Amen.**

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## Scripture Readings for July and August

July 4	2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10	Psalm 48	2 Corinthians 12:2-10	Mark 6:1-13
July 11	2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19	Psalm 24	Ephesians 1:3-14	Mark 6:17-29
July 18	2 Samuel 7:1-14a	Psalm 89:20-37	Ephesians 2:11-22	Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
July 25	2 Samuel 11:2-15	Psalm 14	Ephesians 3:14-21	John 6:1-13
August 1	2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a	Psalm 51:1-12	Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16	John 6:24-35
August 8	2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33	Psalm 130	Ephesians 4:25-5:2	John 6:35, 41-51
August 15	1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14	Psalm 111	Ephesians 5:15-20	John 6:51-58
August 22	1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43	Psalm 95	Ephesians 6:10-20	John 6:56-59
August 29	Song of Solomon 2:8-13	Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9	James 1:17-27	Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

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