## What Is Creation Saying to Us?

# Thanksgiving Sunday, Year A: Share My Abundance!

Texts (non-lectionary): Psalm 138, The Song of Songs 1, Hebrews 13:1–6

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#### Preparation

#### *Cover the communion table with a brown-orange cloth. Borrow a prayer mat from a neighbourhood Muslim family or mosque or that of another faith community; or use a small Asian style rug or a rug made out of straw as a symbolic expression of creation and harvest. Provide a basket, plain in colour, that can be filled with many different vegetables and fruits. Have a gong available. Since the theme involves celebrating the abundance of human senses, it would be most effective to have as many sensory elements* (*sight, sound, smell, movement, touch, and taste*) *as possible included in the worship service.*

\*Please stand, as you are able.

Call to Worship (excerpts of Psalm 138)

(*The sound of gong from rear of sanctuary, followed by…*)

Voice 1: Praise God with our whole heart!

(*The sound of gong, followed by…*)

Voice 2: Give thanks to your name for your steadfast love!

(*The sound of gong, followed by…*)

Voice 3: Let us bow before God’s presence

and respond to God’s calling:

“Share My Abundance!”

\*Processional Hymn

“Praise the Lord with the Sound of Trumpet” (VU 245)

(*One person carries the prayer mat, another holds the basket full of fruits and vegetables—and someone might carry the gong—followed by the worship leaders who process in, while the congregation sings.*)

#### \*Opening Prayer

Leader: Holy One,

in the beginning, you created all things

and called them good.

**All: As we begin our service of thanksgiving**

**we humbly present these symbols before you**.

Leader: In our use of them,

help us see you, hear you, touch you,

**All: and taste how good you are. Amen.**

#### Words of Welcome and Greeting

#### \*Opening Hymn

#### “Open My Eyes, that I May See” (VU 371) verses 1 and 2

#### (*While the presenters put their objects in front of the communion table, children are invited to come forward and the congregation sings seated.*)

#### Focus Time with Children

*Goal: to learn about the things presented in front of the communion table as symbols of thanksgiving and learn about how to praise God with them.*

What do you see in front of our table here? (*Pause and wait for responses.*) The basket full of food is probably not a surprise to you since today we celebrate Thanksgiving Sunday. What delicious looking and smelling fruits and vegetables do we have here! Can you smell the apples? Why don’t you taste the parsley or the basil herbs? Look at the different kinds of pumpkins here: some are small, and some are big, some are yellow, and some are green. These are wonderful gifts from God, aren’t they? Our senses are also an abundant gift from God: to be able to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste is indeed a gift. God longs for us to use this gift as often and as much as possible in worship.

What are the other things you see? (*Indicate the prayer mat.*) And what’s this got to do with Thanksgiving? We call it “a prayer mat.” Many Christians whose culture is associated with sitting on the floor use a mat like this to pray. Many other religious people, whether they are Buddhists or Muslims or Hindus or Sikhs, also use a prayer mat to pray to God. Can someone bring the mat to the group? (*Take a few minutes for them to see and touch the mat.*) Can someone else take the mat and put it down on the floor? The English word “worship” means to honour God, to pay respect to our God, who is good to us and blesses us with so many good things. And in Hebrew, this word is translated into “bow down” before God. So it is right to worship God as we learn to bow with our body. I would like to invite you to take you shoes off now and come to stand on the mat.

Let us bow down to God.

(*Take time for them to use their body to move and pray this way.* *Offer a prayer such as…*)

God, we give big thanks to you for providing us with the bountiful harvest we see today. We thank you for our abundant senses and the body that you give us to enjoy the good things we have from you. Thank you for prayer mats that help us worship you with our body. Help us to honour you with our body as we also honour our body. Amen.

You guys did well!! Thanks for participating in this with me.

#### Hymn

#### “Open My Eyes, that I May See” (VU 371) verse 3

(*Children return to their seats or go to their own program while the congregation sings and the minister rolls up the mat and puts it back along with the basket*.)

#### Prayer of Confession *(in unison)*

O Maker of hands and feet,

how often we forget in worship

that we can use

our body and our senses to honour you.

Creator of all things,

how often we indulge in material things,

failing to respect your other forms of abundance.

Forgive our forgetfulness and failure.

(*a moment of silence for private confession*)

Creator of all,

orient us again to turn to you. Amen.

#### Assurance of Pardon

Hearing our confession this day,

God speaks these words to us:

“Arise, my love.

Let me see your face,

let me hear your voice.

I will give you my love.” (Song of Songs 2:10, 14; 7:12)

So it is true that we may be assured of this:

we are forgiven by our Creator.

Thanks be to God!

#### Passing of the Peace

(*The minister invites people to bow their heads to each other while holding their palms together near their heart as a gesture of respect* (*instead of shaking hands*) *and to greet one another with the words, “Peace of Christ.” This is an opportunity for the whole congregation to participate in experiential learning.*)

**Scripture Reading**

The Song of Songs 1

Hebrews 13:1–16

#### Prayers for Illumination

Radiant and unfading Wisdom,

You are a breath of the power of God.

Help us be instructed by your words. (excerpts of Wisdom of Solomon 6:12,25,7:25)

#### Sermon Suggestions

*Since this might be the last sermon of a series in Creation Time, it would be helpful to connect Thanksgiving for the gifts of creation with the gifts of our senses.*

*As the thematic title of this particular liturgy indicates, there are three foci that can be woven into the sermon: “share,” “my,” and “abundance.”*

*Conventionally and commercially speaking, Thanksgiving is often associated with material abundance: the things we eat, harvest, and stocking up. Not only are material things pointed to, but also we focus on “we” in worship. It is “we” who offer to God; it is “we” who celebrate our fruitful year and our labour. This theme challenges us to see beyond material abundance and to point to God. It is God’s creation through the harvest for which we express our gratitude and it is to God that we give our thanks. The purpose of Thanksgiving Sunday is to help us ascribe to God glory for God’s own creation in the most worshipful and grateful way we can and “abundance” is part of that.*

*Once the subject of God and our centring on God is explored as the “my” part of our theme, the sermon can move on to “share.” God’s ownership does not lessen our part in ownership and our stewardship for the world. God’s ownership over all includes our human ability to appreciate, experience, and restore the creation. The act of “sharing,” a command of creation itself, is an invitation requiring our positive and active work, asking about our stewardship of creation, demanding we look into stewardship of our very own self.*

*What is God asking us to share? Besides our material abundance, what are we called to share with thanksgiving?*

*You may find an answer in The Song of Songs, the text in the Bible from which God is most absent, ironically. One of the shortest books in terms of length, this book is anything but short of imagery, tastes, human voices, and creation’s abundance. Most of all, Song of Songs expresses the beauty and the joy of a love relationship. All that is celebrated in the poem concerns the beauty of nature and the tenderness and devotion of love unspoiled by shame. Such love is arguably a reflection of the divine nature. We may say that God is most present in the book where God is most absent!*

*The Song of Songs is full of mystery and the unknown. There is no scholarly agreement with regards to authorship or date or even how the book is to be divided into its component literary parts. There is no consensus about its purpose, either. However, what is clear is that the first person who is doing the narrative in chapter 1, the partner who is in love, is a Black person, having dark skin. She is also very beautiful. Such a positive affirmation of being Black and beautiful contradicts the thinking that dark is ugly or dangerous and Black skin is inferior and less desirable than White skin.*

*So the Song of Songs not only challenges the dualistic and patriarchal world view that says the body, women’s bodies, eros, and bodily senses are bad and therefore to be denied in Christian spirituality, it also challenges an Eurocentric racist view that justifies White supremacy at the expense of discrimination against non-White racialized peoples.*

*While nobody knows who this Black woman and her lover would be, such unknowing however, does not erase our ability to imagine and wonder. On the contrary, such “unknowing” evokes our imagination in ways that may reach into the realm of the Divine. The unknown characters in the text draw us closer to the mysterious Holy One. This uncertainty enables us to cross the boundary of the dream and the reality. It helps us to taste of the reign of God, which is somewhat beyond our human realm, and yet, at the same time, God’s reign becomes touchable, near and close to our sphere of life. The Song of Songs is a concrete example of what the abundance of life may look like and how we can experience and dream that life more fully. In short, the Song of Songs gets us to glimpse who we are as people full of sensations and gifts we can share.*

*What is most remarkable in this book and key to our theme of “share my abundance,” is the explicit description of the senses that we humans and other living creature have. The Song of Songs does not fear the bodily, sensory, and sensual, but affirms it. We can know God through our sensual experience as a lover, a very present being who is caring, yearning, seeking, and faithful.*

*Agape and Eros, Sacred and Sensual are not opposite counterparts, but complementary to each other, interwoven in this biblical poetry. This song sings of the joys, desires, confusion, pain, and hope of physical love that is sensual, sensory, and sacred. This story touches young people and old people. This poetry reaches out to those who have experienced broken relationship as much as those who enjoy a present relationship or those who anticipate such a relationship.*

*Such a mutual relationship of love is also well stated in the Letter to the Hebrews. “Let mutual love continue,” writes the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews. Interestingly, mutual love is not abstract from the point of view of Hebrews, but very practical acts of “showing hospitality to strangers, caring for those who are in prison and being tortured.” This letter carries the theme of abundance beyond material things and into a new or wider sense of gratitude. A Thanksgiving lesson cannot be said better!*

*Once we move beyond the material abundance of Thanksgiving, we begin to rediscover the gifts of our senses, abilities to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste as much as we begin to deepen our sense of gratitude that is perhaps most well experienced and practised in relationships.*

*Through the gift of ourselves, embodied with our senses, we can and must share the abundance of life with others. Hallelujah! And thanks be to God. Amen!*

#### \*Responsive Hymn

#### “Creator God You Gave Us Life” (MV 27)

#### Prayers of the People

In the beginning, [God], you founded the earth,

and the heavens are the work of your hands (Hebrews 1:10).

The orange Sun powerfully beaming out its colour of harvest

celebrates your creation.

The silver Moon gently soothing the last burst of summer life

also praises you.

We, therefore, join their praise for your warmth and care

reflected upon and painted in the sky.

We give thanks to you for all your glories and for our life of abundance.

We acknowledge before you now

your yearning for us to share this abundant life as we reach out in prayer

to those who cannot celebrate these gifts because of war, poverty, and violence.

We name these people now in silence or aloud: (*names*)

**Responsive Sung Prayer**

“Kyrie Eleison/Lord, Have Mercy” (VU 946, MV 67)

We also pray for those places in creation where want, need, and danger are present.

We name them now in silence or aloud: (*names*)

**Responsive Sung Prayer**

“Kyrie Eleison/Lord, Have Mercy” (VU 946, MV 67)

God, our lover and our everlasting companion,

accept this prayer of concern and thanksgiving.

Help us to continue in mutual love with you and with our neighbours.

This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ; remembering him, we pray:

#### Lord’s Prayer

#### \*Commissioning Hymn

#### “Called by Earth and Sky” (MV 135)

#### \*Commissioning

Go from this place

with thankful hearts and joyful senses,

and let us continue to share earth’s gifts—abundantly!

#### \*Communal Benediction

#### “May the grace of Christ…” (VU 963)

(*The gong and other musical instruments could join in the voices of people singing, while worship leaders process out*.)