



100th Anniversary of the Council on Christian Unity

Worship Resources

Prepared by Ron Allen and Linda McKiernan-Allen

7. Proper 8 in connection with National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship Day **Sunday June 27, 2010**

Resources for Today

Focus for Today
Call to Worship
Opening Prayer
Significant Quote
Responsive Reading
Invitation to the Table
Notes for Preaching Based on the Revised Common Lectionary
Closing Prayer
Possible Hymns and Songs
The Writers

Focus for Today:

Many factors go into forming the self and into the direction of the life of an individual or the life of a community. But we often become a significant part of what we choose. A person or group can consider options, recognize what they will gain and lose by making a particular choice, and then prioritize their resources and energy to move ahead with living out the choice.

The gospel reading for today, Luke 9:51-62, calls attention to the importance of making a clear, bold, decision to follow Jesus. As the exegesis notes, Jesus is on the journey to the final and complete manifestation of the Realm of God. This journey prompts opposition but eventually leads to the resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, and the second coming. To follow Jesus is to join the journey towards the Realm.

For Luke, the Realm includes the great reunion of the human family. This theme is especially appropriate to the fact that today is **National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship Day**. This day is an excellent occasion for a congregation of European origin to become more acquainted with Hispanic cultures and with the experience of Hispanic peoples living in the United States and Canada. Especially in light of the current controversies connected with Arizona's new law demanding authority's questioning of any appearing to be "illegal", this might be a profound time for congregations of Hispanic and European origin to worship together, share a fellowship meal, listen to one another's stories, and share aspects of their cultures.

National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship Day is also a sober day on which individuals and congregations of European origin can recognize and repent of the ways in which we contribute to the oppression of Latinas and Latinos.

A scene from a movie that many ministers may regard as fluff nevertheless contains a revealing moment. In the movie “Maid in Manhattan,” Ralph Fiennes plays an upper class Manhattanite who falls for a character played by Jennifer Lopez. He thinks she is a socialite when, in fact, she is a hotel maid. After their initial encounter, he is passing through the hotel lobby where she is at work, and he looks at her but does not see her. Many people of Hispanic origin report that they are similarly invisible to Eurocentric individuals. People of Hispanic origin live in so many places. Sometimes they work alongside people who simply do not see them, much less seek community. National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship Day provides the preacher and the congregation with the opportunity to make a deliberate choice to follow Jesus towards the Realm and the great reunion of the human family by seeking community with individuals and congregations of Hispanic origin.

Call to Worship

L: Esto es el día que el Señor ha hecho,
P: We will rejoice and be glad in it!

L: We gather to worship God,
P: Nuestro Padre, quién arte en el cielo

L: En español y en inglés, we raise our voices, levantamos nuestras voces
P: Children of one Creator, followers of one Christ.

Opening Prayer

Holy God, we do not turn back from you. Rather, we rejoice with all the living, from every nation and tongue, remembering Christ’s invitation to “follow me”. May your Spirit be made known as we seek to learn and grow in the faith which binds us together. AMEN

Significant Quotes

Writing with Pablo Jiménez, a prodigious scholar of preaching in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Justo L. González describes the experience of people of Hispanic origin who live in the United States as an immigrant or exile experience. This quote, taken from a context in which the authors are describing issues that are important to the Latina/o preacher in the United States, is lengthy but important.

“When we speak of ‘immigration’ as an issue for the *púlpito*, we say this at various levels. At the most superficial level, immigration is an issue because many in our congregations—and many standing in our *púlpitos*—are themselves immigrants. They have all the issues that have always

faced recent immigrants. They need work, shelter, connections, directions, physical and emotional adjustments, and so forth. They also need to learn English, at least to the extent required to be employable. If they do not have documents declaring them to be ‘legal’ immigrants, they must also face fear of all government agencies, lack of public services—to which, even though sometimes entitled, they do not dare have recourse—exploitation by employers, and so on. In some communities, immigration has become an issue for resident Latinos, who fear the possible loss of their underpaid employment.

At a deeper level, immigration and exile become an issue for Hispanics because most of us—even to the third and fourth generations—have emotional and family contacts beyond the borders of the United States. While we may live here, and be fully committed to the issues that engage the generality of the population, we still have ties elsewhere; and these ties lead us to look at issues differently. Much like the Irish who are concerned about issues in Ireland, or the Jews who follow the politics of Israel, we follow the politics, the literature, and in general all the news from Latin America. This raises issues of identity

At the deepest level, immigration is an issue at the *púlpito* because, no matter where we were born, and no matter how many generations our ancestors have lived in these lands, we are still made to feel as immigrants by the dominant culture. Until fairly recently, signs were fairly common in the Southwest: “No Mexicans or dogs allowed.” For those who posted such signs, being a “Mexican” had little to do with one’s place of birth. A Euro-American who arrived in Texas two weeks earlier could easily post such a sign, thereby excluding “Mexicans” whose ancestors had lived there for generations. For all practical purposes, it was the latter, and not the former, who was the ‘immigrant’—or rather, the ‘alien.’” [Justo L. González and Pablo A. Jiménez, *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), pp. 32-33]

Daisy Machado, leading theologian and church historian at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), describes an important task underway in the Latina/o community. After reflecting on the increasing appearance of aliens in television, movies, and fiction, Machado says, “Because these beings are portrayed as distinct from who we are as a nation, or as a racial group, or as humans, it is safe to become moral critics of their behavior. However, more than fiction, these strange-looking aliens are reminder that this country has never been one nation made up of one people with one vision—that has been the ideal and never what the United States has really been. If knowledge is indeed power, and history, as Joyce Appleby says, ‘exercises that power by awakening curiosity, stretching imaginations, deepening appreciation and complicating one’s sense of the possible,’ then we must boldly take possession of that knowledge by recovering the diversity of the history of both Americas. It is not about political correctness or liberal politics. What is at the core for Latinas and Latinos is the ability to free ourselves from the restrictions imposed by the ideological imperatives of an idealized history that serves to exclude and marginalize. What I am referring to is the ability to redefine what has been called by the dominant society as the ‘norm’ and acknowledge that Latinas/os are also ‘normative,’ because our ancestors have been the permanent residents of this hemisphere for centuries. We are not the aliens. We are the heirs of a rich and diverse history that has been over five centuries in the making. We are the daughters and sons born of the interactions of diverse races and cultures who as a whole make us who we are

today. We refuse to be haunted by a historical memory that barely includes us as a people so that we remain faint figures of an ancient past. The new millennium demands that Latinas/os be seen, heard, understood, and embraced. After all, this is the *nuestra América* and we are its proud citizens. [Daisy Machado, "Latina/o Church History: A Haunting Memory," in *Hispanic Christian Thought At the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González*. Edited by Alvin Padilla, Roberto Goizueta, and Eldin Villfañe (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), pp. 123-124]

Invitation to the Table

It is rare for strangers to be invited to share a meal at the family table. Most of us, when we do sit down to a meal, have only those related by marriage or by blood as table partners.

But here, the Table is turned. We are welcome at this table, not because we married into the family, or because we were born into it. Rather, we are welcome at this Table because God so loved the **world**, that the whole world is invited. In the face of communities and states where Spanish-speakers are rejected, at this Table, language is not a reason to discriminate against one another.

Instead, the traditional Hispanic invitation becomes one extended to all: "mi casa es su casa. . . la mesa de Jesus es su mesa" My home is your home, the Table of Jesus is your table. Come! For the feast is prepared and all are welcome here. (CH 111 is appropriate here, for the whole congregation to sing, or for a choir to share as communion elements are distributed).

Notes for Preaching (based on the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary for June 27, 2010)

Luke 9:51-62

The gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts (which tell one story) are divided into large sections. (1) From 1:1 to 9:56, Luke introduces Jesus as an eschatological prophet whom God sent to announce and demonstrate the Realm of God (a new world in which all things take place according to God's purposes). This part of the gospel of Luke takes place in the northern part of the Palestine. However, many in the world (represented by some Jewish and gentile leaders) resist the Realm because they lose their power to control. For Luke, the crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem is the paradigmatic instance of resistance.

(2) Scholars refer to Luke 9:51 through 19:27 as the travel narrative in which Jesus travels from Galilee to Jerusalem. For Luke, Jerusalem is a multivalent symbol that represents both one of the seats of power of the rulers of the old age and their response to the Realm (crucifixion) and the place where the Realm is definitively manifest (the resurrection). The travel narrative has two related functions in Luke-Acts. First, it shows Jesus taking the initiative in the bringing the news of the Realm to Jerusalem. The church is to do likewise in the Book of Acts; the church is to take

the initiative in announcing the Realm. Second, the travel narrative is a figurative way of describing the nature of the life of the disciples and the church: They are on a journey to the final manifestation of the Realm. Indeed, the church in Acts is occasionally called “the Way” (e.g. Acts). The church in Luke’s time is on the same kind of journey as the one narrated in Luke 9:51-19:27.

(3) Luke 19:28 through Acts 2:42 shows that the while the journey includes resistance and conflict (represented by the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus) it leads to the Realm. The Realm is partially manifest through the resurrection of Jesus. By giving the Holy Spirit, God empowers the church to witness to the Realm (to be on the journey, the Way, per Luke 9:51-19:27) until Jesus’ returns. God will be faithful to the church as God was faithful to Jesus (resurrection) as the church follows its mission of taking the news of the Realm to those who have not received it in Jewish and gentile settings, especially the latter.

From Acts 3:1 until the end of the book, the church is on the journey with the Realm. Like Jesus in the gospel of Luke, the church in Acts repeatedly encounters both resistance and welcome. God sustains the church in conflict and continues to manifest the Realm.

Luke’s congregation, of course, lived long after the close of the book of Acts. However, Luke intends for this narrative of Acts to be the model for the life of his own congregation. They, too, will encounter resistance, but they can press forward with their mission because the Spirit is working through them to do the kinds of things that the church does in Acts until the second coming, the last great resurrection. From this point of view Luke-Acts is pastoral encouragement for a beleaguered congregation whose missionary impulse is fading.

As the first material in the journey towards Jerusalem, the gospel reading for today, Luke 9:51-62, is a key moment. In this short passage, Luke uses dramatic language to impress upon Luke’s congregation that they need to make a conscious and considered decision to become a part of the community of the Realm and to continue on that journey. While the destination (the complete coming of the Realm) is joyful, the journey towards it involves struggle, conflict, and even suffering. Luke wants the congregation to be prepared for these hard times. The story told in the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts tells the congregation what is ahead. Luke 9:57-62 urges them to recognize the stakes and to make a deep commitment to see it through.

By referring to Jesus setting his face to go to Jerusalem, Luke 9:51 signals that the journey to Jerusalem will lead to difficulty. The followers of Jesus, too, need to be determined when confronting resistance to the news of the Realm. The reader knows this determination was not a simple act of Jesus’ will, but was empowered by the Holy Spirit with which God filled Jesus at his baptism and with which God filled the church at Pentecost (and in Acts 10:34-44).

In Luke 9:52-56, some Samaritans do not welcome Jesus and the Realm. The disciples want to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans, but Jesus rebukes them. According to God’s plan in Acts 1:8, the news of the Realm is to be preached to the Samaritans in a full-bodied way after Pentecost. If the disciples call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans they encounter on the journey to Jerusalem, the Samaritans would not be able to receive the news of the Realm. They are to be spared. Moreover, calling down fire on the Samaritans would

violate the spirit of Luke 6:27-36. When Jesus is on the cross, Jesus forgives those who crucify him (Luke 23:34). And, in only a few verses (Luke 10:2-37), Luke uses the behavior of a Samaritan as representative of life in the Realm.

Luke 9:57 voices a hope of many in the Lukan congregation. They want to follow Jesus wherever Jesus goes (wherever the Spirit leads the congregation in mission). However, they need to know that Jesus has nowhere to lay his head. He is an itinerant, charismatic prophet who has no permanent base. He is on a journey. Such figures were commonplace in antiquity. They went from place to place, living day to day on the hospitality and support of the people to whom they went. While this life style may seem irresponsible in today's world, people in antiquity regarded it as an act of trust. God would bless their mission by providing for the missionaries through local hospitality. Luke wants his congregation to see God provided for Jesus and the disciples and, consequently, is to be trusted to provide for the church.

Luke underscores the importance of the decision to follow Jesus and to become a part of the witness to the Realm with two short incidents. One person wants to bury a dead parent before coming with Jesus (Luke 9:59-62). In antiquity, showing respect for the dead (including a proper burial) was extremely important. Indeed, the care shown for the dead was an index of the respect for life in a community. The saying, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but go and proclaim the Realm of God," is a dramatic statement of the importance of the Realm of God. Indeed, burying the dead belongs to the old age which is passing away. However, since the church in Acts does bury its dead, it is clear Luke uses the image of letting the dead bury their dead in a figurative way.

A similar analysis applies to Luke 9:60-61. A potential follower wants to say farewell to the family at home. Family ties were essential to identity in antiquity. However, the Lukan Jesus warns that those who put their hand to the plough (who say "Yes" to the Realm) and look back (remain entangled in the relationships of the old age) are not ready for the journey towards the Realm. Again, since we see traditional households functioning together in the book of Acts, it is evident that Luke uses this incident in a forceful but figurative way.

Making a decision to journey with Jesus and the church to the Realm rearranges life priorities as dramatically as leaving the dead to bury themselves or leaving on the journey without paying proper respect to the family that gave one life and identity.

In the final coming of the Realm of course, there will be no dead. The community of the Realm is a resurrected population. Nor will there be conventional household structures. The Realm creates a new human community in which all members are family. People are mutually committed to one another in ways that transcend present family loyalty.

This passage is significant to ministers, congregations, movements and denominations trying to be on the journey to bring about greater shared life in the face of vast differences. Such differences include not only race and ethnicity, but also denominational, theological and ethical perspectives. Moving in the direction of the Realm, the new self-description of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is: A movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

Yet, some individuals and groups outside the church—and within—resist efforts to journey with Jesus towards respectful community among those who are different. Indeed, some of the strongest resistance Realm visionaries face comes from Christians whose understandings of God's purposes are much more limited (even national or tribal). This passage implies that those who are committed to the Realm need to be clear from the outset: commitment to the Realm sometimes brings conflict. They will be strengthened in their witness to the Realm if they make a conscious decision to press ahead. In the language of the passage, they need to keep their hand to the plough.

The passage is significant in a similar way for ministers, congregations, movements and denominations who witness to the values of the Realm in the larger world by seeking mutually supportive community among people of different political visions, national loyalties, religions, and other differences. Conflict around the Realm can be hostile.

The quote by Daisy Machado, above, while not dependent on this passage, exemplifies the spirit of the passage. Latinas/os have resolved to take the steps necessary to become a vital part of the emerging multicultural church and the emerging multicultural society in the United States. These actions call forth resistance. The Latinas/os who have set out on this path—and others who are in solidarity—will be empowered for the journey by making a clear and conscious decision to press ahead, even in the face of opposition.

To adapt imagery from the text, Latinas/os need to leave the racism of the past behind (let the dead bury the dead) and press ahead with Jesus into towards the multicultural Realm already beginning in the present. They cannot be controlled by the racism of the past and present but drawn into the new world. Latinas/os are no longer restricted by the structures of the old age (represented in the text by saying good-bye to family), but need to put their hands on the plough that is turning the soil in the multicultural field of the Realm.

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

The deuteronomistic theologians edited the books of 1 and 2 Kings (along with Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel) about the time of the exile. A major purpose of these books is to explain to the community why the exile occurred (disobedience) and to point the community towards patterns of faith and behavior to prevent a re-occurrence and bring about blessing (obedience).

In deuteronomistic theology, the figure of the prophet is a kind of ombudsperson who compares and contrasts the actual behavior of the community with the behavior the covenant requires. The covenant contained not only promises from God to the community and from the community to God, but also guidelines for how the community was to live in order for blessing to accrue to all.

In covenantal thinking, all in the community are connected. Full blessing is not possible when some in the community are not blessed.

God calls the prophet to interpret the situation of the community from the perspective of the covenant. In particular, the prophets in the deuteronomistic corpus call attention to points at which

the community drifts into idolatry, injustice, violence, and other violations of covenant. The prophet calls the community to repent and explains the consequences of failing to do so. God wants the community to flourish by living faithfully. The presence of the prophet is thus an act of pastoral care for the community on God's part.

Elijah was a paradigm of such prophetic ministry. For example, in 1 Kings 19—an alternative reading for today—Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and demonstrates the superiority of the God of Israel over Baal (and all other gods). One purpose of this narrative is to remind the post-exilic community to avoid the weak and beggarly gods who could not even ignite a few pieces of wood on Mt. Carmel.

The reading for today describes the transfer of power from Elijah to Elisha. Elijah's mantle is a symbol of the prophet's power. At the outset of the story, Elijah uses the mantle to part the Jordan so that he and Elisha could cross on dry ground (2 Kings 2:6-8). After Elisha receives the mantle, Elisha strikes the Jordan with the mantle and crosses on dry ground (2 Kings 2:13-14).

From the deuteronomic point of view, the story has several related points.

- (a) It establishes the authority of Elisha to continue to prophetic ministry of Elisha.
- (b) Because God provides a prophet to the community, the people should know that God does not give up on the community (regardless of their disobedience). God always seeks for the community to flourish.
- (c) It demonstrates that God always provides a prophet to help guide the community towards obedience and away from disobedience.

While the motif of covenant in the deuteronomic theology is specifically focused on Israel, many of its implications can be extended to the way of blessing for the church and for the larger world. The heart of the notion of covenant is mutual commitment to one another for the well being of all. In this larger sense, the obedient person or group is the one that regards itself in covenant with all others for the flourishing of all. When an individual or a congregation or a nation (or any other group) becomes focused on its own well being at the expense of the well being of others, that individual or community invites curse upon itself. While the curse may not come immediately, self-centeredness sets in motion community decay that eventually brings about loss of quality of life.

The prophetic motif in this text has at least two possible implications for today's church. For one, we need to identify—and listen to—the successors of Elisha who speak today. These voices call us from provincial tribal loyalty and open us to the importance of commitment to the well being of others. For the other, the church itself needs to become a prophetic community in the tradition of Elijah and Elisha, pointing to ways that human families can live together with concern for all, and avoiding self-centered preoccupations.

Closing Prayer

We are sent out from this place to demonstrate with our lives the Way of Jesus.
We are called out from this worship to proclaim with our hearts the Way of Love.
We are drawn out from this company to share the Way with sisters and brothers

across the lines of race and clan, over the boundaries of language and culture.
Go, eager to love your neighbor as you love yourself. . .even as we follow Jesus.

Possible Hymns and Songs

Even if you do not normally include hymns or songs in Spanish, today would be a great time to introduce one (or two). Perhaps a children's moment could include a Spanish chorus.

Try: (29) the chorus of Alabare
(107) Jesucristo es el Senor
(111) Santo, Santo, Santo
(493) Somos Uno en Cristo
(344) I Have Decided to Follow Jesus
(589) Lord, I Want to Be a Christian
(346) Where He Leads Me

(Numbers in parenthesis are from the *Chalice Hymnal*)

The Writers

Linda is Interim Minister of West Street Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tipton, Indiana. She writes regularly for the *Journal of Worship Resources* and has edited several volumes of worship resources, including *Celebrating Covenant* (Chalice Press).

Ron teaches preaching and Gospels and Letters at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. One of his books—just published—is designed to help Sunday School classes, Bible study groups, and individuals explore the range of what Christians believe about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, and God's purposes in the world: *A Faith of Your Own: Naming What You Really Believe*. In addition to being short and inexpensive, this volume includes questions for discussion at the end of each chapter.