



Worship Resource

for *Presbyterians Sharing . . . Sunday*
September 30, 2007

Together We Flourish

*You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.*

Psalms 104:14, 15

It is recommended that the last Sunday of September of each year be designated *Presbyterians Sharing . . . Sunday* and that all congregations be urged to plan special events during the preceding or following week to highlight the mission and ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

— 123rd General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings*, p. 330





Call to Worship

L: With divine generosity,
God created us.

P: **With grace and compassion,
Jesus embraces us.**

L: With ideas and inspiration,
the Holy Spirit transforms us.

P: **Now we bring our whole selves to God,
and together we flourish!**

L: Together, let us worship.

OR

The mystery of human existence
is that we belong to God

and have been made in the divine image.

In God we live and move and have our being.

Therefore, we know ourselves
only when we know God.

Our lives must reflect

the Creator's love and purpose for all creation.

We acknowledge God as Creator and Lord.

Living Faith 2.2.1

Prayer of Confession and Adoration (unison)

God of heaven and earth,

you made all things and called them good.

Each day you shape the earth in wonder and mystery,
surrounding us with goodness and growth.

Still, we admit to dry and anxious spirits,
and we confess our anxiety and worry.

In your grace, Jesus Christ,
nourish and renew us.

By the power of your Spirit,
fill us with vibrant new life,
ready to bear the fruit of goodness and love.

Amen.

OR

Opening Prayer

As we gather in worship,

we praise the God who formed the mountains

and sing to the One who made the stars and the heavens.

We honour the Maker who turns darkness into morning

and worship the Spirit who gives breath to all that lives.

May your Creating Spirit be among us, O God
as we gather in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Words of Forgiveness

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

The old life has gone;

a new life has begun.

Together we have confessed our sins to Jesus Christ.

Know that we are forgiven and be at peace.

Amen.

Children's Story

(see insert)

Scripture

Old Testament: Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Responsive Reading: Psalm 104
Epistle: Colossians 1:9-14
Gospel: John 15:1-5

Sermon

Together We Flourish
(see insert)

Call to Offering

"When you are a wise steward, it honours God, relieves tension, gives you self-confidence, eliminates guilt, enhances your witness, and enables you to give more generously" (*Bob Russell, "Preaching Past the Fear Factor," Leadership Magazine, Fall 2002*). Your tithes and offerings will now be received.

OR

In a 2005 article in the *Presbyterian Record*, Phil Callaway relayed a conversation he had with a bunch of guy friends. He said, "Tonight we got to talking about stuff we wish we had. About riding mowers and power sprayers and hot tubs. Then we laughed. Though it's easy to forget, success is not defined by the stuff we grab, but by the foot prints we leave." Your tithes and offerings will now be received.

Prayer of Dedication

Lord, because of your goodness, we have these gifts to share. Use them to make new life possible among us, and beyond us, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God of the Sabbath,

In love you created each of us, and in love you redeemed us through Jesus Christ. Through your loving Spirit you continue to nourish and sustain us each day in all we do. We give you thanks for your constant care.

Thank you for the rhythm of the earth in all its abundance and goodness. We see the seasons changing around us and are reminded of your faithfulness. As summer turns to fall and the landscape bears the marks of another year of growth and harvest, we are grateful for the gifts of food and beauty that are ours to enjoy.

Thank you for the people who surround us. Each individual, with gifts great and small, is evidence of your grace here in our community. Across this country and around the world, we are held in relationship with many others who seek you, and we rejoice in Jesus Christ who binds us together. Together with you, and with each other, we flourish as we seek to serve you.

We pray for the ongoing work of our national church, and especially for the work of *Presbyterians Sharing*. . . . We pray for the staff and servants of our national office, our theological colleges, our sister congregations, and our many diverse ministries. It is by your blessing that they thrive, O God, and we ask for your continued strength, wisdom and nourishment.

We pray for the work of this congregation. We pray for those who faithfully share their gifts, and for those who have responded to your call to share your love with the world. In this busy world of ours, teach us to rest in your abundance. Help us to learn your wise ways of living. Help us to make room for Sabbath living.

Creator God, Redeeming God, Sustaining God, we offer ourselves to you, trusting in your mercy and goodness. Hear our prayers, for we offer them in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.





☞ A Litany of God's Abundance

Thanks to the children of Trafalgar Presbyterian Church whose reflections shaped this litany.

L: We thank God for beautiful things:

P: For flowers and butterflies,
for hearts and rainbows,
for necklaces and new clothes.

L: We thank God for fun things:

P: For sports and school,
for computers and games,
for dogs and guinea pigs.

L: We thank God for everyday things:

P: For a place to live and food to eat,
for sunny days and fresh air,
for good health and strong bodies.

L: We thank God for loving things:

P: For brothers and sisters,
for teachers and friends,
for parents and grandparents.

L: We thank God for the best things:

P: For God who takes care of us,
for Jesus who teaches us,
for God's Spirit who helps us.

L: We thank God for everything!

P: Thanks be to God! Amen.

☞ Benediction

Bless to us, O God,
The moon that is above us,
The earth that is beneath us,
The friends who are around us,
Your image deep within us,
Amen.

— from the Iona Community, Scotland

☞ Music and Hymns

O look and wonder (Psalm 133) #93

O Lord of every shining constellation #302

God, who stretched #305

Sing praise to God on mountain tops #322

Great is thy faithfulness #324

Who made the earth and the heaven #339

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name #409

All things bright and beautiful #435

We are God's people #472

When we are living #630

El cielo canta alegría/Heaven is singing for joy

— Pablo Sosa, OCP Publications



The worship resources for *Presbyterians Sharing* . . . Sunday, September 30, 2007 have been written by the Reverend Kristine O'Brien, minister at Trafalgar Presbyterian Church, Oakville, ON.

A Stewardship/Education for Mission resource, The Presbyterian Church in Canada

For further information call 1-800-619-7301, 416-441-1111, Ext. 267.

Text may be downloaded from the web site at www.presbyterian.ca

Together We Flourish

This sermon is offered to be used as a whole, or as background reading, for the preacher. Please feel free to edit, adapt, or use this sermon as is most helpful for you in your own unique context.

Text: Genesis 1:1–2:1a

Bara' is a special word in the Bible, used only in relation to God, but not in relation to people. It means to create, or to shape, or to make something new. It is such a brilliant act that only God can accomplish it. God "bara's" the sky and earth and stars and vegetation. God "bara's" the birds and beasts and even humankind itself. God is the One — the Only One — who can bara'.

However, there is another meaning behind this Hebrew word. Bara' can also mean 'to be fat' or 'fatness.'

Fat is a difficult word for our 21st century ears. To be fat these days is unpopular with both fashion and health-conscious people. To call someone fat is considered insulting. To be fat is to be unsexy, unhealthy and unattractive.

Interestingly, phat (P-H-A-T) is also an adjective in African American slang to express approval. The word has blossomed since the 60's and now someone or something that is phat is considered cool, rich, entertaining, intelligent or attractive.

However, fat (F-A-T) for the Hebrew people all those years ago was about glorious abundance. It meant prosperity and wealth; it meant well-being and success. Think of later biblical references to heads being anointed with oil, or Jesus having perfumed oil poured out on his feet. Bara' — God creating — was all about this kind 'fatness.' Creation was made in an atmosphere of lush abundance, prosperity and bountiful resources. This is at the heart of the world God created for us.

At a Canadian conference called "The Joy of Stewardship" in 2004, the plenary speaker was a man by the name of Richard Lowery. He talked about this creation story and especially about how the seven days are laid out. He pointed out an important parallel (see Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000):

If you lay them side by side, day one with its creation of light would fall beside day four with the creation of 'lights in the dome of the sky.'

If you lay out day two's creation of sky, it coincides nicely with day five where the birds are created.



In day three, land and plants are created, running parallel with the creatures and people who eat those plants.

Days one, two, three line up with four, five, six. It is a nice little pattern, and a tidy literary structure. But there is something missing: day seven. Day seven stands outside the pattern of God's creating air and water and birds and humans. There is no evening or morning on that day as there were for the other six days either.

According to Lowery, day seven provides the pinnacle of creation, the high point of God's work of *bara'*. The Sabbath day is the highlight of creation. This is the way God created the natural order: to work for six days and to rest on the seventh. This is the rule of the universe, the way God set things in motion in the very beginning.

Unfortunately, if our society doesn't understand the biblical concept of '*fat*' then surely we don't understand the biblical concept of Sabbath either. Sundays, especially in the last 20 years, have become just like any other day. It isn't just Sunday shopping that keeps us from rest; it's the relentless activities, business and communication demands that keep us going day after day without stopping.

Sabbath for many has become an outdated concept, an impractical idea to embrace in our busy 21st century lives. And yet, who is more in need of Sabbath rest than you and I and all those caught up in our frantic North American culture?

Beginning in Advent 2006 and continuing through 2007, our denomination declared a year of focus on the Sabbath. After a year of preparation, there began activities all across the country celebrating God's invitation to rest and renewal. A number of resources, including a reading list of books about the Sabbath, were prepared and shared with congregations. There was the Lenten Bible study, *Joining the Dance*, about Sabbath and the stewardship of creation. There were other bible studies. Poems and photographs were collected and displayed on The Presbyterian Church in Canada web site. Individual congregations began to observe the year of Sabbath in all kinds of creative ways.

There is wisdom in this focus on Sabbath because as writer Julie K. Ageson argues, "In our culture where time has become a commodity and remembering who we are is sometimes a challenge, Sabbath keeping may be more important than ever" (ELCA Resource Centers Sabbath document). When we keep the Sabbath — when we honour the spirit of rest and renewal — we are remembering and imitating God's natural order for creation.

Understanding God's *bara'* is a key part of understanding Sabbath. In the world of *bara'* that God created, there is enough, and more. By God's *bara'* we can work for six days, and yet be sustained for seven. We are invited to get more out of life than we put into it. This is the world in which we have been created to live and flourish: a world of God's abundance and grace.



Sadly, the story of creation has, in some parts of the world, become a politically charged issue. There are those who approach the story of creation from a particular scientific perspective. Some come to the text hoping to prove its authenticity as a historical document. Some hear the story only in an absolute literal sense. Still others understand the seven-day account as nothing but a myth, a fable similar to other ancient legends that tell of gods above and below the earth.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, however, says that this text is neither mythological nor scientific, but is instead a theological affirmation. This story of creation tells us "about the character of God who is bound to his world and about the world which is bound to God" (*Genesis: Interpretation Series*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982, p.26).

The story of creation reveals the character of our God. The character of our God is one of prosperity and abundance, of rest and grace. And if that is God's character, in whose image we are made, then this must be our character too.

When we take time to notice the natural world, we can easily see that creatures do what they are. Winged things fly. Swarming things swarm. Seed-bearing trees bear fruit. Similarly, Christians bear fruit – they do what they are. John's gospel says, "My Father is glorified in this, that you bear much fruit." We are made in the image of a generous God. Our true nature is to be 'fat' just as God is 'fat'.

There are all kinds of ways to live out this 'fat' character that reflects our abundant God. Observing Sabbath is one way. We imitate God's character when we work some and rest some; when we do our part and then relax, trusting that God will provide enough to meet our needs.

Another way is by freely offering our gifts to God's work. We are living out part of our sacred identity when we delight in an abundant world and share with others. We are not preoccupied with worry over whether there will be enough to go around. We are not holding back our gifts, convinced that resources are scarce.

Today, as we celebrate *Presbyterians Sharing . . .* Sunday, we recognize that one special way to live out our 'fat' character is by giving freely to this particular ministry. For years, people in Presbyterian congregations across the country have joyfully given special gifts to this ministry because they understood themselves to be echoes of God's generous character. Even now, God's ministries are being created, renewed, sustained and supported by *Presbyterians Sharing . . .* because of 'fat' Christians all over Canada. When we freely give to *Presbyterians Sharing . . .*, we live out our sacred identity, declaring that we have been created in a spirit of lush abundance.

And in so doing, we bear the fruit of ministry. There are mission personnel – clergy, doctors, educators, veterinarians, church workers, musicologists, nutritionists – working with church partners in many countries around the world. In Canada, there are mission personnel working in inner-city, native, refugee, urban and remote, and ethnic ministries. There are new church developments and youth ministries, justice and ecumenical work, the training and support of



ministers. In addition, our gifts continually help congregations all across Canada as they seek renewal and growth in faith education, worship, evangelism, stewardship, mission education and ministry with children and youth.

Because of our gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing . . .*, students at universities across the country have chaplains to guide and befriend them.

Because of our gifts, Action Réfugiés Montréal provides pastoral support and solidarity to those seeking refuge in Canada.

Because of our gifts, Toronto's Boarding Homes Ministry offers friendship to people on the margins of society.

Because of our gifts, native people in Edmonton have a place to come together as a worshipping and caring community of support.

Because of our gifts, people in Kenya have support in HIV and AIDS research and education.

Because of our gifts, students at a seminary in Romania are enabled to minister through word and song in churches throughout Transylvania.

Because of our gifts, congregations in Guyana are supported in their ministry of Word and Sacrament and Christian education.

Because of our gifts, our Canadian congregations have clergy to serve them.

Because of our gifts, our young people are able to attend and be inspired at Canada Youth events.

Because of our gifts, some non-English-speaking Canadian Presbyterians can worship and praise God on Sunday morning in their own language.

Because of our gifts, Sabbath resources are created and shared.

Because of our gifts, . . . [*the preacher may fill in the blanks as desired*]

As we share our gifts, we affirm God's character of abundance and grace, and God's character is reflected in us, and through us. Together we affirm that by God's grace, ours is a world where God faithfully provides abundant resources day after day, week after week, season after season.

Our gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing . . .* are evidence that we are a bara' people, living in a world that God created with love and grace and a Spirit of abundance.

We are generous people who respond to God's goodness by taking delight in sharing and helping.

We are 'fat' people who appreciate and celebrate God's bountiful resources.

We are God's people.

Together, we flourish. Amen.





Children's Story

There was once a story about five fingers:

1 The first finger said that he was most important because he was the one who gave directions when someone was lost (*point with your first finger*).

2 The second finger said that she was most important because she was the tallest. She believed that only big people can do big things (*show all four fingers*).

3 The third finger said that she was most important because she was the richest —she got to wear the ring (*show your ring finger with some kind of jewelry*).

4 The baby finger said that all the others had it wrong: he was most important because he was the toughest. When someone got excited (especially the preacher!) it was he who took the brunt of it (*make a fist and hit your palm*).

5 But the thumb was very wise. "We are all very special," he explained. "But we are better when we work together. Only together can we pick up a Bible, or praise God with the violin, or share God's love by holding hands with someone else."

The thumb was right. We need each other and we are all better off if we work together.

[The leader may refer to I Corinthians 12:12ff where Paul talks about the different members of the body working together. "In the same way..."]

Have you ever heard of *Presbyterians Sharing ...*? *Presbyterians Sharing ...* is an example of how we can do so much more when we work together, just like the story about the fingers and thumb.

Presbyterians Sharing ... is people in congregations all across Canada sharing their money. By sharing it, enough money is collected to do some really big things like building new churches, or running after-school programs for children in poor areas of our cities, or working with parents in poorer countries so they can grow super-healthy food for their children. There are lots of good and helpful things that Presbyterians across our country are doing by sharing their money. They do this because they love God and want to share God's love. That's why it's called *Presbyterians Sharing ...*

Every gift of money that people give is special, but together those gifts can do even bigger things!

Prayer:

Dear God, help us to remember that each of us is special; also help us remember that together we are even better. Amen.

Suggestion: Order some *Presbyterians Sharing ...* coin boxes (free of charge) from the Book Room. Invite each child to take one home. Perhaps the adults want to take them as well. Provide directions on how you wish the children to use the coin boxes and when they should be returned. Tell the children that when they bring their money together they will add it up. Then they will present it to the congregation in a celebration of giving. It will be included in the congregation's givings to *Presbyterians Sharing ...*. This will allow everybody to do more than they could ever do alone.

