**A Liturgy for Stewardship Sunday**

**November 3, 2013**

**Elinor Swindle Brown**

*The hymns are taken from Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs (HPSS), The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal (WC) and Worship and Service Hymnal (WSH). The numbers are as they are found in these hymnals.*

*Scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version, Copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.*

**Call to Worship**

Leader: We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

**People: Praise God for this gift of hope. God has indeed done glorious and marvelous things.**

Leader: We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.

**People: Praise God for being with us in our suffering. We know that through suffering we have the strength to endure.**

Leader: And endurance produces character.

**People: Praise God for our strength and endurance. Through endurance, we are molded into who we are—servants of God.**

Leader: And character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.

**People: Praise God for our character. With character, we have identity which in turn gives us hope.**

Leader: God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given us.

**People: We begin with hope, draw on this hope for endurance and identity, they in turn give us hope. The circle is complete.**

**All: Praise God for this gift of hope. Alleluia. Amen.**

*Based on Romans 5:2b-5*

**Hymn of Praise** *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past* (HPSS-210, WC-78, WSH-8)

**Call to Confession**

There is no hope for us on our own. We alone can do nothing. But with God, we have hope if we turn away from our sin and ask God to forgive our unworthiness. Let us turn away from sin and turn to the hope of God. Let us pray.

**Prayer of Confession**

O God, we are lost in a world of hopelessness

Because we have not looked for you—the source of all hope.

We look for hope, but instead find despair.

We harden our hearts so the pain of others doesn’t affect us.

We look for love, but instead find hatred.

We pretend not to care because it’s easier than dealing with the conflict.

We look for peace, but instead find war.

We busy ourselves with meaningless tasks because we can’t stop the madness.

We look for joy, but instead find sorrow.

We are overwhelmed by hurt and suffering, so we pretend it’s not there.

O God, forgive us for not doing the things we can do

And for doing the things we shouldn’t do.

Forgive us for forgetting you are the source of our hope

Which brings the world love, peace and joy.

Allow us to be your hope to others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Assurance of Pardon**

We have no hope? Of course, we have hope. And we have that hope because Jesus Christ died to take away our sins. We have repented, we are forgiven—washed clean by God. Praise God for this all-powerful hope in Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Hymn of Thanksgiving** *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*  (HPSS-379, WC-517, WSH-293)

**Time with the Children “**Jim’s Special Gift” by Pat Parsons

I’d like to tell you a story that is entitled “Jim’s Special Gift.” “Each one of you is special,” Mrs Fontes was saying, “God made you one of a kind. Because you are so special and you each have special gifts, we are like the se4rvants Jesus talks about in Matthew. You have a gift, but how it is used depeneds on you.

“I have listed the names of each person in class and I want you to tell what special gift you think each person has and how that person uses his gift.”

Jim groaned to himself. “Where does Mrs. Fontes get all these ideas? I know about some of the others’ gifts and how they use them, but me—I don’t know anything that’s special about me.”

As the papers were being handed out, Jim looked around anxiously. Steven was struggling with his pencil. Steven was younger than the other students in the Sunday School class at First Church and had a hard time with spelling.

“How do you spell ‘piano’?” ask Steven. Jim told him, grinned at Steven, and then began worrying again. “Ways we are special, and how we share them…” Jim mused. He wondered if he was supposed to include his own name and then decided not to. He just couldn’t think of a single thing that he did especially well.

Jim was on the ball team, but he has just barely made the cut. He sang in the school chorus, but was never asked to do a solo and a couple of times had even been asked to sing a little more softly.

“I don’t have any talents, and not much money,” Jim thought.

Jim started to write. It was easy to write about the other friends in his class.

Joey was a good artist. Some of his drawings were on display on the bulletin board. Yes, he had a gift which he shared with the whole church.

Kimberly was a beautiful dancer and had interpreted “The Lord’s Prayer” as part of the worship service a few Sundays ago.

Vicki Jo was a good softball player and had been on the church team at the tournament for the Children’s Home last August.

Eric played the piano, Choung was good at gymnastics, and the list went on. But when Jim thought of himself he became very discouraged.

Manual dropped his pencil and it rolled under Jim’s chair. As Jim handed it back to Manuel, he looked at Manuel’s paper and whispered, “Hey Manuel, your paper really looks neat. You have learned to print well this year.” Jim then went back to the job of listing the gifts of others. He wanted to put down that Jenny was pretty, but he knew the other kids would laugh and tease and he decided not to do that.

“Time!” said Mrs. Fontes, and she began to collect the papers.

Jim wanted to slip out the door. Others had shared their gifts but he had nothing. He was a nobody. He felt so embarrassed he could feel his cheeks getting hot.

Mrs. Fontes took the names from the papers one at a time, going through the comments about each person. Most of the comments were about the same. Chemica could act. William could run fast. Ashley could tell good stories. Then Mrs. Fontes got to Jim’s name. Jim wanted to hide under his chair. There was nothing really good to say about him, he thought.

“Jim is friendly,” Mrs Fontes read. “Jim told me how to spell ‘piano.”

“Jim encourages us. He didn’t yell at me when I missed that easy fly ball, but just grinned and told me I would do better next game.”

“Jim helped me last Sunday when I was lighting the candles and the one in the middle didn’t light. He didn’t just let me stand up there feeling dumb.”

“Jim shares his family with me. He doesn’t get mad when his dad plays pitch with me, too.”

“Jim is my friend.”

The list when on. “You see,” Mrs. Fontes said, “Our gifts come in all kinds of ways, and very few of them are the same. God gives only good gifts to us. Sometimes it is a talent that everyone can see and sometimes it is a quality that helps us be happy and make others feel good about themselves. We should thank God for these gifts.”

Let us pray: Dear God, thank you for our special gifts. Teach us how to use them. Amen.

**Anthem**  *Gonna Be a Great Day*

Alfred Publishing Co., Inc. (2-part w/opt. descant)

**Prayer for Illumination**

Open our ears and our minds to hear your message for us today. Amen.

**Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon**

* Romans 5:2b-5—*We as stewards are given the hope of God through the Holy Spirit to act in ways that, in turn, give hope to others. We recognize Jesus Christ came to our world to be the hope for us—to be our savior, our teacher, our example.*

**Litany of Hope (responsively)**

Leader: Let us pray:

**People: Hope of the World, we rejoice**

**Because you bring hope to our lives.**

Leader: You give us life and through our abilities, we share our lives.

You gave Moses the gift of leadership, Miriam the gift of joy.

You gave Mary Magdalene the gift of service, Paul the gift of evangelism.

In our lives today, you give us many different gifts.

**People: Hope of the World, we rejoice**

**Because you bring hope to our lives.**

Leader: You give us history and through mighty acts we learn to be your people. You led your people out of slavery in Egypt

Into a land flowing with milk and honey.

You led a band of fisherfolk and tax collectors to the cross

And beyond to resurrection.

In our lives today, you lead us into new ways

Of being who you want us to be.

**People: Hope of the World, we rejoice**

**Because you bring hope to our lives.**

Leader: You give us creation and through it let us feel your presence everywhere.

You created green pastures that restored the psalmist’s soul.

You gave fishes and loaves as a bounty from above.

In our lives today, you give us food to eat, vegetation to enjoy

And animals with which to live peaceably.

**People: Hope of the World, we rejoice**

**Because you bring hope to our lives.**

Leader: You give us relationships and through them

Ways to see you in other’s faces.

You let Jacob back to his brother asking for forgiveness

That was already present.

You called the Samaritan woman to the well

Where she received new life springing from the source of life.

In our lives today, you give us people with which to relate in caring ways In order that we might feel your love in our lives.

**People: Hope of the World, we rejoice**

**Because you bring hope to our lives.**

Leader: You give us a mission and the resources with which

To accomplish that mission.

You gave Esther the strength and wisdom to save her people

So they could continue to praise and serve you.

You called on your son Jesus Christ and he answered your call

To a service and mission in the world, even unto death.

In our lives today, you call us to mission

And give us the resources we need for the task at hand.

**All: Hope of the World, we rejoice**

**Because you bring hope to our lives. Amen.**

**Prayers of the People**

God of hope, we come to you as part of a hopeless world longing for a reason to be.

We read the newspapers and watch the news

And ask ourselves “Where is the world’s hope?

We see children and adults wandering the streets in search of their daily needs

And they ask “Where is the needy person’s hope?”

We travel to our jobs knowing our Christian example is ignored by others

Or hidden by ourselves and we ask “Where is our hope?”

We search our minds for sources of hope only to find one—

In our personal lives, our work, our communities, in our world…

You, O God, are our hope.

Hope of the world, give us your strength.

Enable us to be your hope to those around us:

Our children need our love and wisdom to face the world’s temptations.

Our spouses and parents need our support and comfort to face the world’s concerns.

Our church needs our time, money, and efforts to face the world’s needs.

In all things, let your hope shine through us.

God of our hope, give us your hope.

Renew our spiritual lives with the hope of your never-ending grace.

Recreate our Christian witness as we work and play every day.

Reuse us to bring your hope to those who need to see

That you love them enough to clothe, feed, shelter, and embrace them.

Refresh our world blowing your Spirit of Hope

Through people and events so they may speak

As the voice of God to a hurting and hopeless world.

We ask these things in the name of the Hope

Who came down to earth for us—Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Invitation to the Offering**

*Have an anchor, the Christian symbol for hope, placed on the altar. Ask people bring their own signs of hope in the world today to the altar as well as their pledge cards to the church. It is important for all people to participate even if a pledge card is left blank or if a commitment is unspoken. The coming forth is itself a sign and reminder of commitment to God.*

**Commitment Meditations**

*Ask two young people and two children to finish the sentence “I see hope in God’s world when….” Give them several weeks prior to the service to write a paragraph beginning in this way. If the children are small, ask their parents to write down their thoughts, but encourage them to simply record their children’s answers without editing. Small children can then give their own response during the service with little or no prompting.*

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

O God, we ask that these gifts bring hope to a world in need of much hope. Amen.

**Hymn of Commitment** *Live into Hope*  (HPSS-332)

*My Hope is in the Lord* (WC-482, WSH-252)

**Choral Benediction**

“Canto de Esperanza” (Song of Hope), (HPPS-432) is appropriate for the benediction, if you have this hymnal. If you do not, you may be able to secure permission to reprint the words and/or music by wring Westminster/John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396 or checking online for permissions statements.