

Speaking Our Truth **Worship for International Day Against**

Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia 2017



The International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia takes place around the world on May 17. This day emphasizes that homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia are still the reality in the daily lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans members of our communities. To learn more, visit <http://dayagainsthomophobia.org> and search www.united-church.ca for "gender and orientation."

This order of worship written for The United Church of Canada and [Affirm United/ S'affirmer Ensemble](#) by Ruth Wood. Ruth is a retired Designated Minister - Recognized. Ruth is openly transgender and is currently serving as a part time Chaplain at Queen's University in Kingston, ON, Canada, where she has been specifically asked to reach out to the LGBTQ community on campus. Ruth will be retiring from chaplaincy work in May 2017. Perhaps the retirement will actually stick this time.

Lectionary scripture readings (for May 14, 2017 – Year A)

Acts 7:55–60	the stoning of Stephen
Psalms 31 (VU 758)	a lament for those in trouble
1 Peter 2:2–10	being living stones built into a spiritual house
John 14:1–14	part of Jesus' final assurance to his disciples

Suggested additional readings

Acts 8:1–3 (with 7:55–60)	introduces Saul's campaign against the church
Psalms 139:1–6, 13–18	acknowledging God's intimate love for us
John 13:33–35	the New Commandment – that we love one another
Acts 11:1–18	Peter's conviction that the Gentiles are included in God's love

Hymn suggestions

<i>More Voices (MV)</i> 27	"Creator God You Gave Us Life"
<i>More Voices</i> 28	"God of the Bible (Fresh as the Morning)"
<i>More Voices</i> 63	"Long before My Journey's Start"
<i>More Voices</i> 131	"You, Creator God, Have Searched Me"
<i>More Voices</i> 138	"My Love Colours Outside the Lines"
<i>More Voices</i> 145	"Draw the Circle Wide"
<i>More Voices</i> 154	"Deep In Our Hearts"
<i>Voices United (VU)</i> 278	"In the Quiet Curve of Evening"
<i>Voices United</i> 510	"We Have This Ministry"
<i>Voices United</i> 563	"Jesus, You Have Come to the Lakeshore"
<i>Voices United</i> 567	"Will You Come and Follow Me"
<i>Voices United</i> 569	"You Call Us Out"

Call to Worship (option 1)

“Come In, Come In and Sit Down” (Voices United 395)

Sing verses 1 and 2, or recite in a call and response format:

One: Come in, come in and sit down, you are a part of the family.

Many: We are lost and we are found, and we are a part of the family...

Prayer of Approach (option 1)

We know, God, that we who have gathered here are a part of the family.

But we also know that the family is much bigger still.

There are people we don't understand,

there are people we disagree with,

there are people we don't like,

there are people who don't like us.

Challenge us, God, to expand our vision of family,

until we see all of creation as one big family. Amen.

Call to Worship (option 2)

One: Do not let your hearts be troubled...

Many: Easy for you to say, you are not going through what we are going through.

One: It is true, I don't know what you are going through, but neither do you know my pain.

**Many: There are no easy answers, but perhaps in our worship together,
we can work toward understanding,**

One: and in the process we can bear each other's burdens.

Prayer of Approach (option 2, based on Psalm 31)

You, God, are my last hope.

I am desperate, God—will you be a rock I can take a firm stand on?

Listen to me, God, for I am in trouble. I have cried so much my sight is blurry.

My brain does not function and my heart does not feel.

I am frightened, for my job, for my shelter, for my very life.

There is no certainty in my life. I live on the edge, never knowing who will strike me next.

Even my friends turn away.

Loving God, wrap me in your arms. In your care, I will face the stormy seas. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

(Could also be used as a lament or as part of the prayers of the people)

It is not uncommon, for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, for there to be times in our lives where we hide who we are from others. Sometimes we even hide who we are from ourselves.

O God, lover of my soul, I know that you love me.

**But how can you love me if I do not love myself?
And how can I love myself if I do not know myself?
How can I know myself if I do not search deep inside my being?
And how can I search inside if I do not have the courage to accept what I might find?
O God, lover of my soul, I know that you love me,
and in that assurance I will find the courage that I need. Amen.**

Assurance

God knows us and loves us just as we are.

God sees us as all that we can be, and loves us until we get there.

Prayers of the People

Creator, we come to you with both the joys and the sorrows of our hearts.

We are grateful for the gift of life and the joy that it can bring.

For families and friends who love us.

For allies who stick up for us, even when we cannot risk sticking up for ourselves.

For the great diversity you have created in our world.

We pray for those who suffer from discrimination because of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Who worry about their employment or who cannot find a job.

For those who must hide who they are to find housing.

For those who are not safe on our streets. For those who do not feel safe in their place of worship.

Help us to end homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia, and all forms of discrimination and hate.

Show us the way to make this world a better place for all.

Prayer of Jesus A Paraphrase (VU p. 916)

Sermon Starters

Acts 7:55—8:3, 1 Peter 2:2–10

As a result of speaking his truth to the council, Stephen is stoned to death. What are the ways we find to speak our truth? Where do we find the courage?

We hear this passage knowing that in a few days Saul will have his own epiphany and become an advocate for Jesus instead of a persecutor of his followers. The early church, not having this foreknowledge, lived in fear of Saul. How do we make room in our time for people to come to a different understanding of God's will?

For many years the church taught that homosexuality was a sin. Many of us in the church today have moved from one side of this issue to the other. Is there anyone in your congregation who would share what caused them to change their opinion?

The writer of 1 Peter calls us to be living stones, stones used for life, not death. How do we build up our spiritual house to include the diversity of creation?

Psalms 31 (VU 758)

Psalms 31 is a lament that many in the LGBTQ community could relate to. Despite legislation, there is still discrimination. Despite the fact that great strides toward acceptance have been

made, work still needs to be done. Many still find subtle methods are used to deny or hinder basic daily living.

One of the hardest things to live with is the weight of difference. But difference isn't a physical thing, how can it have weight? Clergy often avoid mentioning their profession when they are in a room full of strangers, such as at a party. They know that if they say they are a minister they will likely have people apologizing for swearing, telling friends to be good because there is a minister in the room, or saying, "Gee, I didn't think ministers drank alcohol." That, in a small way, is the weight of difference. For LGBTQ people, the weight is much greater. You wonder if it is okay to mention your partner's name at work, to hold their hand while walking down the street, or to kiss them goodbye at the airport. You wonder what the hotel clerk is thinking when they look at your partner and point out that your room only has one bed in it.

What is the weight like? Think of the lead-lined apron you wear when you get an X-ray at the dentist's office. Imagine if you had a coat made out of the same material. Imagine what it would be like to have to put that coat on every time you left your house. That is what the weight is like. It is always there. Unless you are in a safe place. For some, their place of worship is a safe place. Isn't it time that all places of worship were a safe place? Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble (<http://ause.ca>) helps congregations with the process and education required to make their church one more safe place.

Psalms 139:1-6, 13-18

The Sufis say that God is closer to us than our own jugular vein. The writer of Psalm 139 paints a warm picture of that close God. A God who knows us so intimately that we don't have to explain anything. We are simply understood.

Voices United 349 is a Celtic blessing that ends with the lines "May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet, and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you." While many of us can recognize Christ in others, we have trouble letting others recognize Christ in us. How can we as a church use this portrait of a close God to encourage each other to accept the Christ within us?

John 13:33-35, 14:1-14

In Jesus' farewell words to his disciples, he tells them not to let their hearts be troubled. He assures them that even though he will soon be physically separated from them, they will not be alone, they will have what they need to do works even greater than he has done. How might his commandment that we "love one another" help us to do great works?

Molly Burke is a mental health and anti-bullying activist. She is a motivational speaker and blogger. She is also blind. In one of her videoblogs, "What Being Blind and Being Transgender Have in Common" (<https://youtu.be/r0Eofev0B20>), she talks about the similarities between the experience of losing your sight and being transgender. She points out that what on the surface seems to be entirely different experiences actually have much in common. At the end of the blog she expands the concept, challenging us to learn more about all those we think of as different so that we can discover what we have in common. How might Molly Burke's wisdom help us to find ways to love one another?

Acts 11:1-8

In this passage, Peter retells to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem the story of his vision and

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the following encounter he has with Cornelius in Joppa. It is significant that the story is worth telling twice. In chapter 10 we see Peter's epiphany, his understanding that God does not exclude the Gentiles. In chapter 11, we see church leaders willing to forego one of the tenets of their faith based on Peter's testimony.

In what areas of our life do we need to speak out like Peter to effect change?

Who are the "Gentiles" we still see as outsiders, unfit to be in "our" church?

How might Molly Burke's wisdom (see above, under John 13—14) inform our ways of deciding whom we include?

—*Rev. Ruth Wood*