

Gathering & Welcome

Candle-lighting

Each new day reminds us of the light that dwells within us —
the light God has placed deep within our hearts.

We light the Christ candle,

We remember that we are made of light and love. Thanks be to God.

Opening Responses

Open our spirit

that we may welcome Spirit.

Open our minds

that we may learn together.

Open our hands

that we may reach out in Love

Open our hearts

that we may live the Story of Jesus

and dare to make a difference

one act of kindness at a time.

May it Be So!

Prayer

Dear God, we are always learning, we are always finding out new things,
We thank you that you gave us minds that allow us to think, to ask questions,
to ponder why things are the way they are.

We thank you, too, that you gave us souls that connect us to each other and to
you, and through which we know what it is to belong, to be loved, and to be one
with you.

We thank you for Jesus' words, and for his teaching, for challenging us, and for
bringing us good news and a sense of peace even when we face difficulties.
We thank you for the Holy Spirit, she who is a part of you, and who keeps us
right, keeps us encouraged, and reminds us of your love.

May we face the world knowing you are with us, that we are loved,
and that your peace resides in us. Amen.

Introduction to Scripture

Lydia is from Thyatira (thigh-uh-tee-ruh), a city famous for making purple cloth. Only the wealthy wore garments dyed purple or trimmed with purple. It was so expensive because it required tens of thousands of sea snails to extract enough of the deep purple dye.

Lydia is a businesswoman, a seller of this luxury textile, so she was likely a woman of some wealth.

Lydia is down by the river with a group of friends. As Lydia listens to Paul, we are told the Spirit of Christ opens her heart to respond. She immediately has her entire household baptized. They are welcomed into the Christian Way, the new community forming around the Risen Jesus.

She in turn extends an offer of hospitality. She urges Paul and his companions to come and stay at her home. We are told she 'prevailed upon them', persuaded them! *If you judge me to be a believer in Christ, then come....*"This is likely the beginning of the church in Philippi. Listen to the story:

Scripture: Acts 16:9-15 (in two voices)

First Reflection: *Down By the River*

I love the image of Lydia and the other women gathered for prayer by the river. Let's **sing verse 1 of "Shall We Gather at the River VU710**

Here is a **story** I read this week by the author Elizabeth Gilbert. It heartened me.

Some years ago, I was stuck on a crosstown bus in New York City during rush hour. Traffic was barely moving. The bus was filled with cold, tired people who were deeply irritated with one another, with the world itself. Two men barked at each other about a shove that might or might not have been intentional. A pregnant woman got on, and nobody offered her a seat. Rage was in the air; no mercy would be found here.

But as the bus approached Seventh Avenue, the driver got on the intercom. 'Folks,' he said, 'I know you have had a rough day and you are frustrated. I can't do anything about the weather or traffic, but here is what I can do. As each one of you gets off the bus, I will reach out my hand to you. As you walk by, drop your

troubles into the palm of my hand, okay? Don't take your problems home to your families tonight, just leave them with me. My route goes right by the Hudson River, and when I drive there later, I will open the window and throw your troubles in the water.'

It was as if a spell had lifted. Everyone burst out laughing. Faces gleamed with surprised delight. People who had been pretending for the past hour not to notice each other's existence were suddenly grinning at each other like, is this guy serious?

At the next stop, just as promised, the driver reached out his hand, palm up, and waited. One by one, all the exiting commuters placed their hand just above his and mimed the gesture of dropping something into his palm. Some people laughed as they did this, some teared up but everyone did it. The driver repeated the same lovely ritual at the next stop, too. And the next. All the way to the river.

We sing verse 2 Shall We Gather at the River. VU710

Ritual: *Now We Lay Our Burden Down*

When you arrived you received a packing peanut. It's made from potato starch. Hold it in your hand and contemplate the things that are worrying you or causing you concern right now. Then come to the river and place it in the water. Watch for a moment as the water slowly dissolves the packing peanut. Give your worries or concern to God.

Worshipping at home, you might want to imagine putting your worries or concerns in your hands and then go to the sink for your river and give your worries and concerns to God, letting them go.

Let us gather at the river.

Music for Meditation

Time for Giving Thanks

Give thanks to God for changing the form of your worries,
for dispersing your worries,
for holding your worries,
for sharing your worries with you. (silent prayer)

We sing verse 3 Shall We Gather at the River. VU710

Scripture: John 14:23-29, *The Melody of Peace*

Prayer:

Dear God, we are always facing new things, and that can be exciting, it can be a little scary, and sometimes surprising.

We thank you that you gave us minds that allow us to think, to ask questions, to ponder why things are the way they are.

We thank you, too, that you gave us souls that connect us to each other and to you, and through which we know what it is to belong, to be loved, and to be one with you.

We thank you for Jesus' words and for his teaching, for challenging us, and for bringing us good news and a sense of peace even when we face difficulties.

We thank you for the Holy Spirit, she who is a part of you, and who keeps us right, keeps us encouraged, and reminds us of your love.

May we face the world knowing you are with us, that we are loved, that your peace resides in us. Amen.

Offering & Dedication PPTX

For the peace that you give us,
we thank you.

For the love that you bring us,
we bless you.

For the gifts that you offer us,
we praise you.

Bringer of peace, and love, and blessing
may the gifts we offer bring peace where there is no peace,
and love, where love is sorely lacking.

**May they be a source of blessing
and may they help to build
your beloved community and kingdom. Amen.**

Song: What Can I Do? MV191

Announcements

Song: For the Healing of the Nation's VU678

O, God of peace, we pray for peace in this song that is a beautiful prayer.

Blessing

Peace I give you

Deep peace

Shared community

Peaceable kingdom

Go in peace

In the spirit

In compassion

In love

Elizabeth Gilbert is an American author best known for her memoir *Eat, Pray, Love*.

The Ritual is based on the work of Carolyn Gammon, Kereru Publishing

Some prayers reflect the work of Spill the Beans.