

BELOVED



1 John 4:7

SERVICE SUNDAY 2024 WORSHIP RESOURCES

Suggested observance: Feb. 4, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Today is Service Sunday. This is a day to remember those who have served us as individuals. We admire those who serve our congregation. We celebrate those who work for the denomination and other ministries beyond the Church of the Brethren. Let us take a moment to silently name those who have served in the past and continue to serve us now. [Silent moment.] May these saints be an inspiration to us as we rejoice in the gift of serving others as Christ has taught us to do. Let the message today of selfless service move us to be the hands and feet of Jesus as we enter into this time of worship.

—Ben Bear, Unit 277

CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus offers a new-old commandment,
that we should love each other.

With the incredible power
and the unfathomable depth
of God's love for us
we can
we must
love one another.

And it is in this
our love for one another
that the world will know
whom and what we worship.

Come, children of God,
let us love one another.

—by Katherine Hawker, re-worship.blogspot.com

SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 4:7-12

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Loving God, I can only love others with your love, for of myself my love is so limited. Pour forth your love into my heart so that the love of Jesus streams out from me as rivers of His living water. I pray that through me, your love would bless those around me. Amen.

—from <https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/1-John/4/7>

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God, we confess to you our human weakness, our human stubbornness, to not forgive and love one another, for lashing out in anger and hatred to our brother and sister. O God, we say that we love you, yet we ignore the suffering of others. We say that we love you, yet we strike back at our brothers and sisters with vengeance. Help us love you better by loving our neighbor. Help us show to others the love you gave to us. Help us open our eyes to the people around us, and fill our hearts with loving compassion. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

—Grey Robinson, BVS Unit 318

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Loving and grace-filled God,
Your love is transforming our lives into followers who know how to love; to love even those that are the hardest to love. This is not an easy request, but by your grace, we continue to be transformed each time we fall short. Thank you for continuing to call us back to you, and sending Jesus Christ to serve as an example of your *agape* love. Please continue to bless our work, that it may glorify you. Amen.

—Emily Tyler, BVS Unit 265

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Our Lord, who has called us to love, open our eyes so that we can see the beloved community around us. Help us to see the many layers of that community and how we make a difference in every one of them, both individually and as a faith family. Help us discover where and how we can use the gifts that you have shared with us to bless others, so that the ripples of your love will flow from our center outward, bringing joy, hope, comfort, and light in this world. Amen.

—Sharon Franzén, manager of Brethren Disaster Ministries

LITANY/READING

In Toni Morrison's novel Beloved, community matriarch Baby Suggs leads fellow formerly enslaved neighbors in a liberative, embodied spiritual practice in a clearing in the woods. The following reading draws from this scene of the book and from 1 Corinthians 12 and 13.

Then she shouted, "Let the children come! . . . Let your mothers hear you laugh." Then, "Let the grown men come. . . . Let your wives and your children see you dance." Finally, she called the women to her. "Cry, for the living and the dead. Just cry."

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart. . . . "Here, in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs: flesh that dances on bare feet in the grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh."

God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.

If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Dearly Beloved, may we preserve dignity and foster freedom as we serve with hands and feet, head and heart.

—Marianne Fitzkee, Unit 333, Quito, Ecuador

POEM OF SERVICE

I am your Beloved

The sun on my face

The wind in the trees

The breath in my chest

Your gifts given to me.

So I give to others the gifts that I have

My friendship, attention, laughter, and Love

I share my belongings to work hand in hand

My service in deed; small but yet grand

Your presence a light guiding our way

Beside one another

Actions intentional

Across many lands

Sharing your love

Finding our way

Back to you

—Carolyn Neher, associate director, Children's Disaster Services

REFLECTIONS

What does it mean to be “beloved”? We usually think of it as someone or something that is dearly or deeply loved, close to our hearts—someone, perhaps, who feels what it means to “be loved.” It is used frequently in some translations of scripture, such as the NRSV, which uses the term more than 100 times.

It's often used to describe those who are part of the Christian community in the New Testament, with the apostle Paul and other epistle writers employing it frequently. According to some sources, the word's archaic origins carried a sense of "to be pleased with." So we could think of those who are "beloved" as those who live in a way pleasing to God. And those who live in such a way are drawn more deeply into that life of love. Indeed, at the scene of Jesus' baptism in the Gospels, the voice from heaven declares, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

In reflecting on 1 John 4, which uses "beloved" three times in its short run, author and preacher Ralph Minton says: "I am sure this passage must have been central to the thinking of my friend, the 14th century mystic, Julian of Norwich. After much wrestling, she finally comes down to the thought that there is only one thing you can say about God. God is love. That's it. Nothing more and nothing less. And being a theologian, she then went on to write a book (*The Essence of Julian*) about that insight. For Julian, the implications are huge. It means that it is impossible to live outside the love of God. Unaware of God's love—sure. But never outside of it."

As ones who are aware of God's love, who seek to live in a way pleasing to that God of love, we are likewise driven to love one another. The writer of 1 John says those concepts are inseparable. Centuries later, Church of the Brethren founder Alexander Mack similarly said the Brethren would be known "by the manner of their living." What does it look like for us to live as beloved ones who share the deep love of God—what theologian Paul Tillich called "the moving power of life"—in our serving and in all we do?

—Walt Wiltschek, office coordinator, BVS

SKIT

1: I love God!

2: Oh my gosh—me, too!

1: It seems so easy, right?

2: Well, when you're the creator of ice cream, kittens, porch swings, and thrift stores, it's pretty easy to be loved!

1: It's not always that easy, though. Think of the cashier at the gas station in town.

2: You mean the guy with the weird glasses and crooked teeth?

1: That's the guy.

2: Ew. He is strange. I don't talk to him if I can help it.

1: Then you apparently don't love God as much as you think you do.

2: What?! Why do you say that?

1: Loving the oddball gas station guy is part of loving God. It's not optional.

2: Huh. I guess I never thought of it that way. This means I need to learn to love that lady at the bank that spits when she talks, doesn't it?

1: Yeah, but I think you can do it. Loving God isn't always effortless, but it's what we are called to do.

2: I suppose you're right. This doesn't sound like it will be very easy.

1: Yeah, but do you know what will make it easier?

2: What's that?

1: Buying ice cream from the gas station guy!

2: Yes! I just might need to practice loving God more often!

—Ben Bear, Unit 277

BENEDICTION/SENDING

Beloved, the world is waiting! Uncountable people and places and situations are looking for someone just like you to come, to share, to look, to listen, to feel, to pray, to witness, to act, to serve, to love—fully and deeply and wonderfully. You are loved by a God who IS love, so get out there and show the world what that love looks like. Amen.

—Walt Wiltschek, office coordinator, BVS

Service Sunday, recognized annually the first Sunday of February, is a combined effort of Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children's Disaster Services, Brethren Volunteer Service, FaithX, the Brethren Service Center, and related programs of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board. Congregations and church leaders are encouraged to use this Sunday to lift up those who serve, or have served, in their local communities and throughout the world.