



**Resources for observance of  
Presbyterian Criminal Justice Sunday**  
January 26, 2014 or any Sundays in the life of your worshiping community

**Call to Worship- from Psalm 27**

Leader: The Lord is our light and our salvation!

**People: The Lord is not just our light, but the light of the world.**

Leader: God is our shelter! God is our help! It is God who saves us!

**People: God is not just our help but helper to all: poor and rich, free and jailed, hungry and full, friend and enemy.**

**All: Let's share the Lord's goodness as we sing and praise the God of all.**

**Prayer of Adoration**

God of creation, your love is greater than the limits of our imagination. Your mercy is greater than the weakness of our compassions. You freed the Israelites from the house of bondage. You called us to break every chain, to loosen the yoke and to let the oppressed go free. And You came among us so that we might be freed to a new hope and a new life in Christ. God of wonder, your loving mercy is our hope and our life. Lord, where our brothers and sisters are not free, move our hearts to serve your will. Amen

**Prayer of Confession**

Lord, you are a God of second chances and know that when it comes to ourselves we gladly accept the multiple chances you give us when we fail you. Far too often we do not extend the same forgiveness to others. We try to keep people tethered to the sins of their past. We let their drug abuse, violence, or other crimes tell us who they are rather than listen to who you say they are. Forgive us, God, of our arrogance and selectiveness in sharing your Good News and help us see that we are all your beloved children. Amen.

**Litany**

O God our hope, the powerful still profit as your children are bought and sold. In a world of slavery and private prisons, we pray:

**God our Creator, move amongst us. In your mercy, bring good news to the poor.**

O God our joy, too many of your children languish behind bars and struggle to find their place in your kingdom. In a world of mass incarceration, we pray:

**God our Redeemer, move amongst us. In your mercy, bring release to the prisoners.**

O God our light, we offer each other so few chances for forgiveness and reconciliation. For those that have caused hurt, and for those that are hurting, we pray:

**God our Sustainer, move amongst us. In your mercy, bring sight to those who do not see.**

O God our life, we hold each other captive by the wrongs we have done and the wrongs that have been done to us. Lord, free us from the chains that bind us to what is past. For those who have committed wrongs and for those who have been victims, we pray:

**God in Christ, move amongst us. In your mercy, bring freedom to the oppressed.**

O God our hope, move amongst us. Make us your hands and feet to visit those imprisoned, to build and restore communities, to proclaim your justice, and to live out your love. For your kingdom here amongst us we pray:

**One God in Trinity, move amongst us. In your mercy bring in the year of your favor. Amen.**

### **Prayer for Illumination**

God in Spirit, open our hearts and minds. As we hear the words of scripture read and hear the Word proclaimed, may we encounter your Living Word as a light of justice shining in the darkness.

### **Sermon Starters**

#### **Isaiah 9:1-4**

*But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. <sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. <sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. <sup>4</sup>For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. (NRSV)*

Today, many are in a state of anguish, but a light is shining. Where do we find the light shining in our own lives and in our own congregations and communities? A land of deep darkness has different connotations for people who are incarcerated, especially for those who have experienced solitary confinement. As our courts continue to debate whether solitary confinement is “cruel and unusual punishment,” we remember that Christ said to us, “I was in prison and you visited me.” We have been called to new acts of mercy in the service of Christ. How is God in Christ calling us to shine a light of hope and mercy? How can we break the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor? Are you called to visit? Are you called to advocate?

#### **1 Corinthians 1:10-18**

*And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup>No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. <sup>14</sup>Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols.*

*<sup>15</sup>I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we who are many are one*

*body, for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup>Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? (NRSV)*

Paul tells us that there is one bread that we break, and that though we are many, we are one body of Christ. What does it mean when we incarcerate as many as one out of every one hundred of our brothers and sisters, and separate them from our communities? How can we break one bread and be one body when we set our neighbors apart as an “other”? Who are our “partners in the altar”? Can people be our “partners in the altar” even if they’ve hurt one another or committed a truly heinous crime?

### **Matthew 4:12-23**

*<sup>12</sup>Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. <sup>13</sup>He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: <sup>15</sup>“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— <sup>16</sup>the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” <sup>17</sup>From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

*<sup>18</sup>As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup>And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” <sup>20</sup>Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup>As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup>Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.*

*<sup>23</sup>Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. (NRSV)*

God’s people have been arrested throughout the course of history; sometimes justly, and sometimes unjustly. Yet we serve a God whose justice is different than our own. As Christians, we follow a theology of grace, where we are not punished for what we have done, but redeemed by who God is. God calls us not for what we have done or not done, but for what God has planned for us, who God made us to be, how God loves us.

### **Psalms 27:1,4-9**

*<sup>1</sup>The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

*<sup>4</sup>One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.*

*<sup>5</sup>For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.*

*<sup>6</sup>Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.*

*<sup>7</sup>Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!*

*<sup>8</sup>“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.*

*<sup>9</sup>Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! (NRSV)*

God tells us not to fear over and over again. But still, time and time again, fear keeps us from acting. Christ commands us to visit those in prison. Is it fear that keeps us away? The

Psalmist's bold statement is, "The Lord is my light and my salvation: the stronghold of my life! Of whom should I be afraid?" Well? Of whom shall we be afraid? God is with us...those who are incarcerated and those who are not. Those who are not incarcerated are called to be there as God's hands and feet for those who are; to visit, to seek God with shouts of joy, to serve, and to not be afraid! God is our help. God is our salvation! Of whom shall we be afraid?

### **Prayer of Great Thanksgiving**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right and our greatest joy to give you our thanks and praise. You formed us from the elements of the universe, and by your breath you gave us life. You loved us with a perfect love and gave us the gift of being able to share that love in the world. You formed a covenant with your people. You wrote it on our hearts and promised your love would flow out like living waters. When we turned from you, you sent prophets to call us back to you and remind us that to love you means to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly in your presence. But even where we fail to serve you, leaving chains unbroken and our neighbors hungry, you have kept your covenant and promise that your light will break like the dawn on all of your people.

And so we praise you, joining our voices with the prophets, apostles, and martyrs; with all the faithful of every time and place who forever sing to your glory:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!**

Loving God, you are holy. And in Christ you have shown us the fullness of your boundless love. In Christ, our Emmanuel, you have made yourself "God with us", and have come into a broken and hurting world to show us the way of life. In Jesus you set your people free from the chains that bind us, broke open the bread of life for all who are hungry, and poured out the living waters of grace on all who are hurting, lost, and in need of hope. Even as we rejected you, and Jesus was betrayed, arrested, beaten, jailed, and executed, our cruelest failings couldn't hold back your reconciling mercy. In your endless love, you raised Christ from the dead, breaking the power of sin and death and freeing us to new life and new hope!

And so with the hope that comes from the presence of Christ, our God with us, we take this bread and this cup from the gifts you have given us, and we celebrate the joy and redemption you have given us as we proclaim the great mystery of faith:

**Christ has died,**

**Christ is risen,**

**Christ will come again.**

Gracious God, pour out your Spirit on us, and on this bread and this cup that they may be for us the bread of life and the cup of salvation, the communion of the living Christ. By your Spirit, unite us with all your people. Bind our hearts to the hearts of the hurting, the hungry, the addicted, the imprisoned, and the sick. As this bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to be Christ's body in the world filled with passion to serve your justice and mercy. As this cup is Christ's blood poured out for us, send us out as the people of your covenant to pour out your love like living waters to a world in need. Make us one people and one church, united by one hope: that every chain might be broken and that all God's people, the redeemed of every time and place, will feast together at the table set before us in the kingdom of God.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, God our creator; One God, now and forever. **Amen**

### **Words of Institution**

### **Hymn Suggestions**

#### **1991 "blue" PC(USA) hymnal**

Live into Hope #376

Help Us Accept Each Other #358

#### **Glory to God Hymnal**

For Everyone Born (Communion Hymn) #739

#### **Celebration Hymnal**

Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness #293

#### **Lift Up Your Hearts (RCA hymnal)**

When Asked, Who is My Neighbor #294

Let Justice Flow #295

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The Presbyterian Criminal Justice Network (PCJN) is a network of  
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