

## **Joining Hearts and Voices**

### **A Group Process for Creating Elements of Worship**

**By Susan M. Heafield**

This process is an attempt:

- To offer to God the varied gifts of the members of Christ's body;
- To include individuals in a group process that creates a particular element of worship, spoken, enacted, or sung (for example a Call to Worship, Prayer of Thanksgiving, Short Song, Affirmation of Faith, or Visual Environment);
- To draw on people's gifts and skills or discover new gifts that can be developed.

The end product of each group process can be included in Sunday worship, either on one particular Sunday or over several Sundays. It will thus be offered to God as a work of the Holy Spirit in the congregation.

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The process preferably has two sessions, allowing time for editing and polishing in between.

#### **Basic Outline (to be adapted for different groups and needs)**

- Choose a worship element appropriate to the age and experience of a particular group (usually a group that has an ongoing reason for meeting: women's group, men's group, youth groups, choir, Sunday School class, committee, etc.).
- Clarify the theological and liturgical framework: for example, a prayer of praise might follow a Trinitarian form; a Great Thanksgiving for Communion might follow an outline in a denominational hymnal or service book.
- Choose appropriate scripture as the focus (e.g. a passage used by the group in its devotional life or a lectionary passage for a given Sunday). I always work from a scripture text.
- Explain the aim of the process.
- Break down the work into simple and distinct tasks, each assigned to a different small group. If the worship element is verbal, frame questions that encourage concrete and specific responses; if non-verbal, invite groups to brainstorm different ways of doing it.
- Collect the results and (between sessions) weave them together, with minimal necessary editing or polishing into a coherent whole that tries to express the group's "mind" and does justice to its intent. If need be, find a person or persons with skills to do this: e.g. wordsmith, journalist, visual artist, musician, dramatist.
- Bring the edited draft for the group to use and hopefully endorse.
- Use the "end product" in Sunday worship.

The above process can be used for any worship element. Since music is my strength, I shall focus mainly on techniques by which a group can create a song, using three examples.

## **One: United Methodist Women –Martha's Vineyard**

The group met twice, in January and February 2008. Our hope was to prepare a prayer of confession and sung Assurance of Pardon for Palm Sunday. Our Lectionary texts were Matthew 26:47-56 and Colossians 1:11-14.

At the January meeting I began by explaining that each person has creative energy and ideas, all of which are gifts from God. Put them together in the right way and we may find more than we can come up with alone.

I read the Matthew passage aloud, asking people to make a mental note of words or phrases that stuck out and claimed their attention. I handed out worksheets, as the group organized into mini-groups (3-4 people). Focusing on the Matthew passage, the worksheets said: Please list in **single words** or **very short phrases** your responses to this question –

What does this story suggest about how we rebel against God, are held in captivity, or hide from God or ourselves?

- Rebellion – resisting God's love: deliberate act or refusal to act.
- Captivity – can't escape: in bondage to something or someone.
- Hiding from God – hiding from or behind something or someone else.

Take 5-8 minutes then share collectively (5 min)

Mini-groups (3-4 people) then gathered their findings, in response to the above question.

When the groups finished their task, I suggested that God's response to rebellion is forgiveness; to our captivities, deliverance, and that God's response to our hiding is to nudge, call or lead us into God's healing light.

A small working group was formed to review the ideas that had been gathered.

At the February meeting we went through a similar process with Colossians 1:11 -14. I asked mini-groups to list ways that God's promise in Jesus comes to us as –

- Forgiveness of sin;
- Deliverance from captivity;
- Coming out of hiding – coming into the light.

A group of 2-4 volunteers then put together the following –

### **A Responsive Prayer of Confession**

Holy God –  
By your life-giving Spirit  
**Forgive us and free us.**

When we are selfish and refuse to act, for fear of failure or blame –  
By your life-giving Spirit  
**Forgive us and free us.**

When we close our hearts to you, and shut out your voice –  
 By your life-giving Spirit  
**Forgive us and free us.**  
 When are in gripped by anger, addiction and any other captivity –  
 By your life-giving Spirit  
**Forgive us and free us.**  
 Help us to recognize and resist unfair treatment.  
 Encourage us, teach us and strengthen us –  
 By your life-giving Spirit  
**Forgive us and free us. Amen**

### **Words of Assurance and Promise**

Who can give us strength in weakness?  
**God alone, through Jesus Christ!**  
 Who can help us endure disappointment, sadness and pain?  
**God alone, through Jesus Christ!**  
 Who can give us knowledge and courage to change?  
**God alone, through Jesus Christ!**  
 Who can move us to trust and forgive?  
**God alone, through Jesus Christ!**  
 Who can fill us with faith, growth and possibility?  
**God alone, through Jesus Christ!**

### **Lyrics for a Song of Hope –**

Bring us from darkness to light:  
 Give us joy.  
 Give us the power to endure:  
 Give us peace.  
 Fill us with courage to change:  
 Give us hope.  
 Thank you for making us strong:  
 Give us love.

How to get from lyric to song? I find that, given time and encouragement, members of a group start singing phrases that become a song. My role is to facilitate the process – something that anyone with minimal music training can do. To help the group and me, I sketch a music staff, 5-line treble clef on a blackboard, newsprint, erasable whiteboard or whatever is available, and invite people to make up melodies for the lyric. I write tones on the staff – 5 tones for children; an octave scale for adults. I play the sequence of five tones or an octave and people pick a tone or cluster of tones. Soon the choices make some kind of melody idea. Then we expand from that. Gradually, as people try out ideas, some prove more popular or singable than others, improvements are made, the melodies go up on the board and the music comes together. I usually get the melody idea that works with the newly fashioned words and form a small group, or one or two persons who may have music experience or inclination to complete creating a melody fitting to the words.

**Bring us From Darkness into Light**

## **Two: Loved by Jesus, Making Peace**

From two Sessions with children, approximate ages: 3-5, at Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church, Atlanta, a song based on Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

In the first session, after a getting-acquainted time, I asked the following set of questions, receiving a variety of responses:

**Who knows about Jesus?** Bearing in mind the young age range, the responses were short and simple: Jesus lived a long time ago; he was kind; he met the devil. Jesus was a person; he hung on a cross; rose from the tomb on Easter. He studied hard as a child and learned about important things from God.

**Like what?** –

Loving one another and being peaceful (This echoes the Scripture text -“Blessed are the peacemakers”)

Martin Luther King wanted peace (This being Atlanta, the children had been taught about Martin Luther King).

Moms and Dads want peace.

From the Scripture text we drew the idea that “Blessed” means Blessing people with love and care. This makes us Children of God.

**How?**

We are children of God when we...do good things –

**What good things can we do?** Being nice to each other. Listen. Don’t kill. Try not to start fights.

In the second session, I reintroduced Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God,” summarized the ideas from the first session and introduced lyrics drawn from their ideas –

**We are children of God**

**Talking to Jesus.**

**We are children of God,**

**Loved by Jesus, making peace.**

Jesus said, “Do not kill.

Love one another.

You will be children of God,

helping each other, making peace.”

Jesus hung on a cross

and rose at Easter,

making us children of God,

loved forever, making peace.

Jesus gives us love

to bless each other,

like Martin Luther King

not starting fights, but making peace.

I said – “What are we missing? The tune! We are going to write a tune.”

I put up a sheet with a five-tone major scale, from middle C to G, and got out a xylophone. I began to ask the children what sounds they liked, and eventually arrived at phrases of melody. They enjoyed taking part by coming forward and making sounds with the mallet. We hopefully arrived at a tune that matched their input and wishes.

### Loved by Jesus, Making Peace

*Refrain* C G G7 C



We are child-ren of God, talk - ing to Je - sus.

G G7 C *Fine*



We are child-ren of God, loved by Je - sus, mak - ing peace.

G C F C



1. Je - sus says, "Do not kill. Love one an - oth - er.  
2. Je - sus hung on a cross and rose at East - er  
3. Je - sus sends us to love and bless each o - ther,

F C F G G7 *D.C.*



You will be child - ren of God, help - ing each o - ther, mak - ing peace."  
mak - ing us child - ren of God, loved for - ev - er, mak - ing peace.  
like Mar - tin Lu - ther King not start - ing fights but mak - ing peace.

WORDS and MUSIC: Susan Heafield  
Words and Music © 2011 Susan Heafield

tune name  
meter

### **Three: With Body Bent**

I was in a group of twenty-five women on retreat near Atlanta. We had built community, so were ready for a deeper exploration.

I began with a story by Sue Bender: "In the Zen Buddhist tradition, a monk starts out each day with an empty bowl in his hands, and whatever is placed in the bowl will be his nourishment for the day. Each day is a fresh start."

I used this story hoping to open our minds to new possibilities.

We heard our focus Scripture reading –Jesus healing the Bent-over Woman in Luke 13:10-17. We then broke into mini-groups (3-4 people) for 12-15 minutes' discussion of the following – Put yourself in the bent-over woman's place:

What was her faith journey like?

What impact did Jesus have on her faith journey?

Is there anything in your life that connects with this story?

We then regrouped for open discussion to bring back information to whole group (important to the process because the whole group would need to claim the end product).

As preparation for the next step – making a song - I asked: 'Has music ever been a part of your faith journey in a particular way?' and shared how I would come home from school every day and play the piano for 30-45 minutes, before I practiced. What I played was what mattered to me at the time – some of which I made up or I played a song by ear that I heard on the radio.

We went back into the same small groups, asking them to create a four line lyric, for which we could make music. I assisted the process by writing - for simplicity - a C Major scale.

I suggested they try writing their own verse/music per small group using the ideas that came from each group. They offered the words and applied it to some notes; they simply saw the scale on the newsprint, had the pitches in mind and called out their words and picked notes to go with it. We tried a variety of things and came up with some note combination.

At this point a small group of women took the words ideas and worked together to refine into four lines of words that could coordinate with the theme of notes we collectively found in the larger regroup time.

I then took their words and notes a refined them into the first phase of the song "With Body Bent." We used this in closing worship on Sunday morning. Here is the lyric –

With body bent and spirit bound,  
A woman brave and hopeful waits.  
With gaze forever downward cast  
She stands within the synagogue.  
She is our sister stooped in pain.  
Our day of rest shall bring release.  
At Jesus' call she slowly walks  
And gazes at his sandaled feet.

By healing grace her frame uncurls.  
She sees his face and praises God.

I then asked a wordsmith (my spouse Brian) to refine them, and I did the same kind of work with the music.

I then sent the finished product to our producer, Roy Clark, and he put the finishing touches on it and got it into publishable form.

# With Body Bent

(Luke 13:10-17)

Hymn by Women's Retreat 2004  
Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church,  
Atlanta, Georgia

*flowing, with pedal throughout*

The musical score is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature (C). It consists of four systems of music. The first system is a piano introduction with a treble and bass clef, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system begins the vocal entry, with the vocal line in the upper staff and piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The lyrics for this system are: "With bo - dy bent and spir - it bound, a wom - an brave and". The piano accompaniment is marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The third system continues the vocal line with the lyrics: "hope - ful waits. With gaze for - e - ver down - ward cast she stands with - in the". The fourth system concludes the vocal line with the lyrics: "syn - a - gogue. She is our sis - ter stooped in pain. Our day of rest shall". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

16

bring re - lease. At Je - sus' call, she slow - ly walks and gaz - es at his

20

san - daled feet. By heal - ing grace her frame un - curls. She sees his face and

24

prais - es God. By heal - ing grace her frame un - curls. She sees his face and

28

prais - - - - es God.

*mf*

*ritard*