Worship is at the heart of most Children’s Sabbaths. It is in worship that we praise God who has blessed us with children and charged us with their care. It is in worship that we hear again the prophets and their warnings against injustice and their call to do justice. It is in worship that we renew our commitment to follow Jesus who said to welcome the children because in doing so we welcome him and not just him but the one who sent him. As we go forth from worship in the power of the Holy Spirit, may we continue to praise God with our work to nurture and protect all children.

This section provides worship resources for Christian congregations. It includes:

- Suggestions for the worship service, including ways to involve children and youths
- Sample Children’s Sabbath liturgies for Roman Catholic parishes, Episcopal parishes and Protestant churches to use or adapt to be appropriate for your particular congregation
- Additional prayers
- Additional worship materials
- A sample Children’s Sermon
Suggestions for the Worship Service on Children’s Sabbath

- **Use the bulletin inserts** in the Promoting Your Children’s Sabbath Section available for download at [www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths).

- **Use or adapt one of the sample worship services** provided in this section.

- **Create your own materials on the theme** of children, ending poverty and closing the opportunity gaps so that every child may realize their promise and potential.

- **Use readings from worship and prayer books** that include a social action theme.

- **Incorporate resources from your denomination that focus on children and child advocacy.** For example, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has a Vision Statement on ministry to children, The Episcopal Church has an Episcopal Charter for Children, The United Methodist Church uses The Bishops’ Initiative on Children and Poverty, and the Roman Catholic Church has the Bishops’ statement “Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for our Church, Nation and World.” These could be used in place of a more traditional affirmation of faith, as an act of commitment, or incorporated in another part of the service.

- **Select hymns and anthems that focus on children and our responsibilities to them.** (The sample worship services include music suggestions.) Glory to God: Hymns and Songs for Children and Families “Singing Faith All Day Long” is a new CD from Presbyterian Publishing that includes many songs ideal for use with children and adults for Children’s Sabbath worship, education, and activities and for year-round use.

- **Focus the sermon or homily on children and our responsibility to act on their behalf.** If appropriate, draw on the Sermon Notes on texts designated in the Revised Common Lectionary, Roman Catholic Lectionary, Lutheran Lectionary and Episcopal Lectionary for October 21, 2018 (the Gospel and Epistle readings coincide in all four lectionaries; the Old Testament lessons and Psalms differ).

- **Use or adapt the suggested Children’s Sermon in this section.** Or, in a role reversal, have one of the children give an “Adults’ Sermon”—a sermon from a child addressed to adults.

- **Include a commissioning service for those whose work or volunteer efforts are devoted to ending child poverty.** Following the sermon, these professionals or volunteers (contacted in advance) may be invited to come forward for a brief service that recognizes their work as a form of ministry, with prayers for God’s guidance in their work and prayers for the children whom they serve.

- **Commission staff and board members of child-serving programs** affiliated with the congregation, and celebrate their work as part of the congregation’s mission.

- **Include prayers for children who are in need.** Specifically name problems afflicting children in your community, as well as crises affecting children across our nation and throughout our world.
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR THE CHILDREN’S SABBATH

• **Invite a speaker from a program serving children to deliver a “minute for mission” during your announcement time or to speak at another point in the service.** Encourage the speaker to highlight opportunities for members to become involved themselves and to speak out for children.

• **Collect a special offering to benefit a program serving children or families,** such as a program serving children in poverty, an after-school program, mentoring and tutoring program, community health clinic, or Head Start program. Announce the offering in advance so that members will be prepared. Dedicate the offering during the service. The offering could be in the form of money or items such as children’s books, diapers or other needed items.

• **Invite on-site child care staff, administrators, parents and children to attend your Children’s Sabbath,** or invite the children, parents, staff and administration from neighborhood schools.

**Involve Children and Youths**

The Children’s Sabbath, unlike a traditional Youth Sunday or Children’s Day, is intended to involve adults in the planning and leadership of the day. As members of the congregation, adults must recognize the challenges facing children in our nation, and their collective responsibility to respond. However, the Children’s Sabbath is an important time to include children and youths in the planning and leadership of the worship service and all other events. For example, children and youths can:

• Have an overnight “lock in” at the church beforehand to learn about worship and plan their parts in the Children’s Sabbath.
• Design and paint the paraments (e.g., cloth draping the pulpit).
• Draw pictures for the bulletin cover.
• Assist and greet worshippers as they arrive or leave, light candles or collect the offering.
• Begin the Children’s Sabbath by entering in a procession. The children could carry a banner they made.
• Read prayers and scriptural passages and lead responsive readings.
• Write a prayer to be used in the service.
• Present a short drama or liturgical dance as part of the service.
• Sing a special anthem, play an instrumental piece or perform a song in sign language.
• Remain throughout the entire service instead of departing for church school classes. If the children remain throughout, ensure that the worship service appropriately engages them.
• Have adults “adopt” children to sit with during the service.
Catholic Liturgy for Children’s Sabbath

This sample liturgy provides suggestions for incorporating the focus of the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® celebration into the standard liturgy for the 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B, which falls on October 21, 2018.

Introductory Rites

Entrance Song: “All Are Welcome” (Marty Haugen), “God Is Here!” (#667; this and all other hymn numbers refer to Worship, GIA Publications) or “Gather Us In” (#665).

Greeting:
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit
Amen.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. And also with you.

Today marks the 27th annual National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths celebration, titled “Realizing Dr. King’s Vision for Every Child: Lives of Hope, Not Despair.” We join with the faithful across our nation and with people of every religious tradition to work for a hopeful future in which no child suffers poverty. In our rich nation today, one out of every 5 children lives in poverty. As Pope Francis has said:

...[L]ittle by little we are growing immune to other people’s tragedies, seeing them as something “natural.” We are bombarded by so many images that we see pain, but do not touch it; we hear weeping, but do not comfort it; we see thirst but do not satisfy it. All those human lives turn into one more news story. While the headlines may change, the pain, the hunger and the thirst remain; they do not go away....

We need to “de-naturalize” extreme poverty, to stop seeing it as a statistic rather than a reality. Why? Because poverty has a face! It has the face of a child; it has the face of a family; it has the face of people, young and old. It has the face of widespread unemployment and lack of opportunity. It has the face of forced migrations, and of empty or destroyed homes. (6/13/16)

On this Children’s Sabbath weekend and throughout the year to come, people of faith are responding to the reality of poverty seen in the faces of children and families, drawing on the sacred texts, teachings and traditions that call us to love and seek justice for children, and moving forward with hope to put faith into action. Pope Francis, meeting with school children, said: “Poverty calls us to sow hope. . . . Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus, in that child who is hungry, in the one who is sick, in those unjust social structures.” Today, on this weekend marked as Children’s Sabbath in religious traditions across our nation, we unite to sow hope by ending child poverty and working for a time when every child will experience love and justice.”
Penitential Rite

Priest: Coming together as God's family, with confidence let us ask the Father's forgiveness, for God is full of gentleness and compassion. Lord Jesus, you came as a child in the fullness of humanity that we may know God's love for us. Lord, have mercy.
People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you called the children to you and blessed them that we may know God's love for children. Christ, have mercy.
People: Christ, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you will judge us by how we care for the least of these our brothers and sisters. Lord, have mercy.
People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
People: Amen.

Gloria

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, our source of power and inspiration, give us strength and joy in serving you as followers of Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Reading 1 IS 53:10-11

The LORD was pleased to crush him in infirmity. If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.

Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear.

Responsorial Psalm: PS 32

R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

The word of the Lord is faithful, and all his works to be trusted. The Lord loves justice and right; and fills the earth with his love.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
The Lord looks on those who revere him,
on those who hope in his love,
to rescue their souls from death,
to keep them alive in famine.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
Our soul is waiting for the Lord
The Lord is our help and our shielf.
May your love be upon us, O Lord,
as we place all our hope in you.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Reading 2 HEB 4:14-16
Brothers and sisters:
Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,
let us hold fast to our confession.
For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but one who has similarly been tested in every way,
yet without sin.
So let us confidently approach the throne of grace
to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

Alleluia Mark 10:45
R. Alleluia
The Son of Man came to save and to give his life as a ransom for all.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mark 10:35-45
James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him,
“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”
He replied, “What do you wish me to do for you?”
They answered him, “Grant that in your glory
we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.”
Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking.
Can you drink the cup that I drink
or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”
They said to him, “We can.”

Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink, you will drink,
and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;
but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give
but is for those for whom it has been prepared.”
When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John.
Jesus summoned them and said to them,
“You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles
lord it over them,
and their great ones make their authority over them felt.
But it shall not be so among you.
Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant;
whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.
For the Son of Man did not come to be served
but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Homily**
*(See Sermon Notes on pages 69-77)*

**Profession of Faith**

**General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)**

**Priest:**
The love of God is manifest in the Word made flesh and revealed as God’s own child. As
brothers and sisters of Jesus, let us bring before God our prayer for all children, saying, “Lord,
hear your children’s prayer.”

For the holy Church of God, that we follow ever more closely Christ Jesus who taught us that
whoever would be first must be last of all and servant of all, we pray to the Lord:

**Lord, hear your children’s prayer.**

For all the peoples of the world; especially the billion children and families who live on less
than one dollar a day, we pray to the Lord:

**Lord, hear your children’s prayer.**

For those who serve in elected office; that they may lead with courage and wisdom, reflecting
the Church’s teaching that the moral test of our society is how the weak, the poor, and the
vulnerable are faring, we pray to the Lord:

**Lord, hear your children’s prayer.**

For those who are suffering from poverty and injustice; that our actions lead to change that
helps them live in dignity, we pray to the Lord:

**Lord, hear your children’s prayer.**

For ourselves and our community; that we recognize your image in every child, that we work
to bless all children as Jesus welcomed them, and that your spirit unites us to work for justice,
we pray to the Lord:

**Lord, hear your children’s prayer.**

For all who have died; especially the children who died from causes we could have prevented
or injustice we could have ended, we pray to the Lord:
Lord, hear your children’s prayer.

Priest:
God of love,  
who shelters us like a mother hen  
and welcomes us like a father,  
hear the prayers of your Church  
and grant us today  
what we ask of you in faith.  
We ask this through Christ our Brother. Amen.

OR: Prayer from USCCB “Help Us Build Communities in God’s Vision of Justice”

Holy Spirit,  
We praise and thank you!  
You anoint us to  
bring glad tidings to the poor  
proclaim liberty to captives  
recover sight for the blind  
free the oppressed  
and build communities in keeping  
with God’s vision of justice.  
Show us how to be  
light of the world  
salt of the earth  
seeds that sprout love  
and leaven that infuses humanity  
with the desire to promote  
human dignity and solidarity.  
Help us to listen so that  
those in poverty can lead our efforts to  
proclaim a more hopeful vision  
liberate captives from injustice  
heal the blindness of the powerful  
free us all from self-centeredness  
and build community to overcome poverty. Amen.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Breaking of the Bread

Communion

Communion Song: “The Harvest of Justice” (David Haas), “I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord” (#726)  
Song of Praise: “We Are Called” (David Haas), “Go Make a Difference” (Steve Angrisano)
**Prayer after Communion**
Let us pray. Lord, may this Eucharist help us to remain faithful. May it teach us the way to eternal life. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

_Amen._

**Concluding Rite**

**Greeting**
The Lord be with you.

_And also with you._

**Blessing**
Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing. Jesus taught us that whoever welcomes one such child in his name welcomes him, and whoever welcomes him welcomes not him but the One who sent him. May God grant you compassion and courage to serve with love and call for justice so that all children may thrive. May almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. _Amen._

**Dismissal**
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.

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**PovertyUSA is the domestic anti-poverty program of the U.S. Catholic Bishops.** An initiative of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), PovertyUSA seeks to educate and promote understanding about poverty and its root causes. PovertyUSA has a variety of education programs and activities for children and adults that may be helpful additions to your celebration of the 2018 Children’s Sabbath with our focus on ending child poverty. Visit [www.povertyusa.org](http://www.povertyusa.org)

“A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being.” (Pope Francis, Address to the Food and Agricultural Organization, 6/20/13)

“Poverty calls us to sow hope. . . . Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus, in that child who is hungry, in the one who is sick, in those unjust social structures.”

(Pope Francis, Meeting with Students of Jesuit Schools—Q & A, 6/7/13)

**The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also has many resources focused on Faithful Citizenship** that may be helpful to focus on values that protect and seek justice for people in poverty, especially children.
Episcopal Liturgy for Children’s Sabbath

This sample liturgy provides suggestions for incorporating the focus of the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths celebration into the standard Episcopal liturgy for Proper 24, Year B, which falls on October 21, 2018.

Throughout the liturgy, we have provided two options, one from The Book of Common Prayer and the other from Enriching Our Worship: Supplemental Liturgical Materials prepared by The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music of The Episcopal Church.

The Word of God


Opening Sentences

Option 1: (From The Book of Common Prayer, hereafter referred to as BCP)

Celebrant: Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
People: And blessed be His kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Option 2: (From Enriching Our Worship: Supplemental Liturgical Materials prepared by The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, hereafter referred to as EOW)

Celebrant: Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.
People: Glory to God forever and ever.

Celebrant may say: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.


The Collect of the Day

Option 1: (BCP)

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.
Celebrant: Let us pray.

The Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Option 2: (EOW)

Celebrant: God be with you.
People: And also with you.
Celebrant: Let us pray.
On the Children's Sabbath

Eternal God, you sent us Jesus, hope of the world, who came to us first as a child in poverty, who fled the threat of violence as a refugee. Help us to follow him through as servant leaders to bring your love and justice to children; through Jesus Christ your Child who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. People: Amen.

People: Amen.

Option 3: (BCP)

For Social Justice:

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Lessons

Old Testament: Exodus 33:12-23 [Alternate: Isaiah 53:4-12]

Option 1:
(BCP) After each reading, the Reader says: The Word of the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.

Option 2:
(EOW) After each reading, the Reader says: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.
People: Thanks be to God.

Psalm: Ps. 104:1-9, 25m 37b [Alternate: Psalm 91:9-16]

Epistle: Hebrews 5:1-10

Gospel: Mark 10:35-45

Option 1:
(BCP) The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to St. Matthew.
People: Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Option 2:
(EOW) The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ, according to St. Matthew.

The Sermon
(See Sermon Resources on Pages 69-77)

The Nicene Creed

The Prayers of the People and Confession of Sin

Option 1:
Form II, Form IV, or Form VI which follows: (BCP)

In peace, we pray to you, Lord God.

Silence.
For all people in their daily life and work;  
For our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone.  
For this community, the nation and the world;  
For all who work for justice, freedom, and peace.  
For the just and proper use of our creation;  
For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression.  
For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;  
For those who minister to the sick, the friendless, and the needy.  
For the peace and unity of the Church of God;  
For all who proclaim the Gospel, and all who seek the Truth.  
For [N. our presiding Bishop, and N. our Bishop(s); and for] all bishops and other ministers;  
For all who serve God in his Church.  
For the special needs and concerns of this congregation.  
Silence.  
The people may add their own petitions.  
Hear us, Lord;  
For your mercy is great.  
We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life.  
Silence.  
The people may add their own thanksgivings.  
We will exalt you, O God our King;  
And praise your Name for ever and ever.  
We pray for all who have died, that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom.  
Silence.  
The people may add their own petitions.  
Lord, let your loving-kindness be upon them; Who put their trust in you.  
We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins.  
Silence may be kept.  
Leader and People  
Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; in your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things done and left undone; And so uphold us by your Spirit that we may live and serve you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  

Prayers of the People  

Option 2  
On this weekend celebrated as Children’s Sabbath in congregations across the land, trusting that God hears both the prayers we offer in the silence of our hearts and those we voice together, let us pray for the Church and for the world. The psalmist praised God as a Mighty Ruler, Lover of Justice. When I say “Mighty God, Lover of Justice,” let us all respond, “hear our prayers.”
Grant, O God, that all who gather in Christ’s name will throw wide our doors and our hearts and lift our hands and voices to proclaim your promise of love and will for justice, especially for those who are young, poor, vulnerable, and oppressed.

Silence

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

Hear our prayer.

Guide our nation and all of our leaders, that they will champion the cause of the children and families most oppressed and govern with truth, compassion, and justice.

Silence

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

Hear our prayer.

Bless the families of our world, especially the billion who lack the income, clean water, health care or education needed to live into the fullness of life.

Silence

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

Hear our prayer.

Strengthen us to create a nation and world of justice so that every child may live with plenty and not poverty, with peace and not threatened by violence, surrounded by family, not separated, so that all children have lives of hope, not despair.

Silence

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

Hear our prayer.

Comfort all who suffer, especially those who are hungry, are victims of violence, or struggle without a job or enough income to meet their needs.

Silence

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

Hear our prayer.

Gather to yourself all who have died, especially those who died from poverty, violence, and other causes we could have prevented.

Silence

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

Hear our prayer.

Almighty God, Lover of Justice, hear these the prayers of your children and grant them for the sake of your beloved child Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
Absolution
Option 1: (BCP)
The Bishop when present, or the Priest:
Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

Option 2: (EOW)
Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through the grace of Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

The Peace
The Celebrant says to the people:
Let us share the peace of Christ with one another, and give thanks for the children among us who show us new ways to walk in peace together.

Option 1: (BCP)
Celebrant: The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People: And also with you.

Option 2: (EOW)
Celebrant: The peace of Christ be always with you.
People: And also with you.

The Holy Communion
Offertory Hymn: “When the Poor One” (#802 WLP), “As Those of Old” (#705)
(You may wish to include the Act of Commitment as a way for parishioners to make an offering of themselves—their time, commitment, voices.)

The Great Thanksgiving
Option 1: Eucharistic Prayer C (BCP)

Proper Preface for Children’s Sabbath
Because you have blessed us with children and have given your own Child, the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, to reveal the fullness of your love and mercy.

Option 2: Eucharistic Prayer for the Children’s Sabbath
Celebrant: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them to the Lord.
Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.
Celebrant: We give you thanks and praise, amazing God, who made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry; You watch over the strangers, uphold the children and most vulnerable parents, and have triumphed over sin and evil. (from Psalm 146)
On this Children’s Sabbath day, we give you thanks, O God, especially for children, for the blessing they are and the blessing we may be to them, as we seek to heed your prophets and do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

And so we join the saints and angels in proclaiming your glory, as we sing (say),

_Celebrant and People:_ 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.

_The Celebrant continues:_ We praise you, O God, for sending your beloved child Jesus born as a baby nurtured by his family, and protected by strangers, who grew as a child who was taught in his temple, surrounded by his community, and guided by his parents, who became an adult who loved and blessed the children, who cared for those who were sick, poor, and left out, who taught that God loves us like a parent, and who called us his friends. This one who was born a baby needing us died our Savior whom we all need, triumphant even over death, freeing us to live as your beloved children.

(At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing the wine to be consecrated.)

On the night before he died for us, Jesus was at the table with his friends. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, and said: “Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. As you do this, remember me.”

As supper was ending, Jesus took the cup of wine. Again, he gave thanks, gave it to them, and said: “Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, remember me.”

Around your table, as your children, O God, we remember Jesus Christ,
Who came in love, lived in love, and died in love,
Who was and is and is to come.
We offer to you our gifts of bread and wine,
And we offer to you our lives.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ, that they strengthen us to welcome the children, to show your love, to work for your justice, to bring your peace. Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to you be honor, glory, and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**The Breaking of the Bread**

*Option 1:* (BCP)

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.
**Option 2:** (EOW)
We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ.
We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.

**Communion Hymn:** “Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service” (#610), “As We Gather at Your Table” (#763 WLP), “The Church of Christ in Every Age” (#779 WLP), “Lord You Give the Great Commission” (#780 WLP)

**Post Communion Prayer**

**Option 1:** (BCP)
Let us pray. Eternal God, heavenly Father, You have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior, Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Option 2:** (adapted from EOW)
Loving God, we give you thanks for restoring us in your image and nourishing us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood. Now send us forth a people, forgiven, healed, renewed; that we may proclaim your love to the world through serving the children and continue in the risen life of Christ our Savior. Amen.

**The Blessing** (adapted from EOW)
The Wisdom of God
and the Grace of God
strengthen you
to be Christ’s hands and heart in this world,
reaching out especially to our children,
in the name of the Holy Trinity. Amen.
(source: Celtic)

**The Dismissal**

**Celebrant:** Remembering especially all our children, go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
**People:** Thanks be to God.
2018 Children’s Sabbath Protestant Service: Realizing Dr. King’s Vision for Every Child: Lives of Hope, Not Despair

Call to Worship
(led by one voice, several voices, or responsively)
When the disciples tried to keep children from Jesus,
Jesus said “Let the children come to me!”
When the disciples wanted to send hungry people away, saying there were too many to feed,
Jesus said we can feed them!
When a parent whose child was in terrible trouble came to Jesus,
Jesus said he would help.
When a woman in poverty gave what she could,
Jesus honored her generosity.

We gather in the name of that Jesus who welcomed the children, fed hungry people, helped children in trouble, and recognized the gifts of those in poverty. On this Children’s Sabbath day, let us follow him in word and in deed.

Hymn of Praise
Possibilities include: “Gather Us In” (Marty Haugen), “Womb of Life and Source of Being” (Ruth Duck), “God the Sculptor of the Mountains” (John Thornburg), “Bring Many Names; God, You Spin the Whirling Planets” (Jane Parker Huber), “For the Beauty of the Earth; Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us” (Daniel Bechtel), “God of Great and God of Small” (Natalie Sleeth)

Call to Confession
At school, at work, at home, everywhere we often try hard to look like we’re perfect, like we’re doing it all right. But God knows that’s not true—that we make mistakes, get it wrong, say or do something we shouldn’t or wish we hadn’t. God doesn’t want us to pretend to be perfect. Instead, God invites us to confess our sin, trusting Jesus’ promise that we are loved and forgiven, and make a new start with God and each other.

Prayer of Confession
God of great and small, old and young, near and far, oh God of all, we confess that our love is not like yours. In the face of injustice, we often feel helpless or hopeless. We give in to despair about ending poverty, stopping gun violence, or uniting families torn apart by forces more powerful than them. Help us to work for justice, especially to end poverty. Help us to love kindness, working especially to end violence. Help us to walk humbly with you, opening our arms to all children as did the one we follow and in whose name we pray, Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

Assurance of Pardon
Listen! I have something to say! God sent God’s own child Jesus that we might know ourselves to be loved and forgiven children of God. Hear and believe the good news: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

The Peace
Time with Children/Children’s Sermon
(See sample Children’s Sermon on page 78)

Anthem/Hymn
One possibility is Live Into Hope

Prayer for Illumination
Send us your Holy Spirit, O God,
as we hear your word read and proclaimed
on this Children’s Sabbath day.
Don’t let us settle for being settled,
comfortable with being comforted,
set at ease with an easy word.
Instead, we pray that your Spirit will
surprise us with new insight,
help us see you where we least expect you,
and move us to new responses. Amen.

Old Testament Reading

New Testament Reading

Sermon (See Sermon Resources on pages 69-77)

Hymn
Possibilities include: “Together We Serve” (Daniel Charles Damon), “The Church of Christ Cannot Be Bound” (Adam M. L. Tice), “When All Is Ended” (Brian Wren), “We’ve Come This Far By Faith, Called as Partners in Christ’s Service” (Jane Parker Huber)

Affirmation of Faith (Select one from your tradition that most closely relates to the day’s theme.)

Other Liturgical Responses to the Word
(According to your tradition, one or more of the following may be incorporated into the service: Act of Commitment, baptism, reaffirmation of baptismal vows, or other pastoral rite of the church.)

Offering

Prayer
(by Marian Wright Edelman)

God, help us to end poverty in our time.
The poverty of having a child with too little to eat and no place to sleep, no air, sunlight and space to breathe, bask, and grow.
The poverty of watching your child suffer hunger or get sicker and sicker and not knowing what to do or how to get help because you don’t have another dime or a car, money, or health insurance.
The poverty of working your fingers to the bone every day taking care of somebody else's children and neglecting your own, and still not being able to pay your bills.

The poverty of having a job which does not let you afford a stable place to live and being terrified you'll become homeless and lose your children to foster care.

The poverty of losing your job, running out of unemployment benefits, and having no other help in sight.

The poverty of working all your life caring for your own children and having to start all over again caring for the grandchildren you love.

The poverty of earning a college degree, having children, opening a day care center, and taking home $300 a week—or a month—if you're lucky.

The poverty of loneliness and isolation and alienation—having no one to call or visit, tell you where to get help, assist you in getting it, or care if you're living or dead.

The poverty of having too much and sharing too little and having the burden of nothing to carry.

The poverty of convenient blindness and deafness and indifference to others.

The poverty of low aim and paltry purpose, of weak will and tiny vision, of big meetings and small actions, of loud talk and sullen grudging service.

The poverty of believing in nothing, standing for nothing, sharing nothing, sacrificing nothing, struggling with others for nothing.

The poverty of pride and ingratitude for God's gifts of life and children and family and freedom and home and country and not wanting for others what you want for yourself.

The poverty of greed for more and more and more, ignoring, blaming, and exploiting the needy, and taking from the weak to please the strong.

The poverty of addiction to more and more things, drugs, drink, work, self, violence, power, fleeting fame, and an unjust status quo.

The poverty of fear which keeps you from doing the thing you think is right.

The poverty of convenient ignorance about the needs of those around you and of despair and cynicism.

God help us end poverty in our time, in all its faces and places, young and old, rural, urban, suburban and small town too, and in every color of humans You have made everywhere.

God help us to end poverty in our time in all its guises—inside and out—physical and spiritual, so that all our and Your children may live the lives that you intend.
The Eucharist
Congregations that will be celebrating the Lord’s Supper should incorporate the appropriate liturgical material. See the Episcopal Liturgy on pages 54-57.

Communion Hymn Options include: “For Everyone Born” (Shirley Erena Murray), “Give Thanks” (Henry Smith), “I Come with Joy” (Brian Wren), “In Remembrance of Me” (Ragan Courtney), “Taste and See” (James E. Moore, Jr.), “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ” (Fred Kaan), “Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether” (Percey Dearmer), “Rise, O Church, like Christ Arisen” (Susan Palo Cerwien) “When the Poor Ones/Cuando el Pobre” (Jose Anonio Olivar and Miguel Manzano)

Closing Hymn
Suggested: “May the God of Hope Go With Us/Canto de Esperanza” (Alvin Schumaat)

Charge and Benediction
Go forth to be the arms of God’s love for every child.
Go forth to extend Christ’s welcome to every child.
Go forth to be a voice for justice in the power of the Spirit.

May God of love, hope, and justice
be with you and each child of God
this day and forevermore.
Additional Worship Materials

Prophets of a Future Not Our Own
It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church’s mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

(From the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, this prayer was written by Fr. Ken Utener for a homily presented by Cardinal Dearden in 1979 and quoted by Pope Francis in 2015).

Prayer for Children
Great God,
guard the laughter of children.
Bring them safely through injury and illness
so they may live the promises you give.
Do not let us be so preoccupied with our purposes
that we fail to hear their voices,
or pay attention to their special vision of the truth;
but keep us with them,
ready to listen and to love,
even as in Jesus Christ you have loved us,
your grown-up, wayward children. Amen.

(From Presbyterian Church (USA) The Book of Common Worship)

Prayer of Confession
God of all and not just some,
We confess that when some have too much and others too little,
we have not proclaimed your justice.
When some have been surrounded by love and others excluded,
we have not reached out with your radical inclusion.
When some have been set on easy paths forward and others left to stumble over obstacles,
we have not cleared the way as Jesus admonished.
When some are nurtured and others abandoned,
we have not embraced them with your love.
When some are encouraged and others disheartened,

we have not spoken your word of hope.

Forgive us, we pray, for the ways we have not lived up to

the scope of your vision,

the depth of your love,

the wideness of your embrace.

God of all and not just some,

help us to embody your love and speak your justice

until every child may live into the fullness of the promise

for which you created them.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus who came for all and not just some. Amen.

**Litany of Response**

**Leader:** Who is the greatest?

**All:** The one who can change.

**Leader:** Who is the greatest?

**All:** The one who can become like a child.

**Leader:** Who is the greatest?

**All:** The one who becomes humble.

**Leader:** If we cause a child to stumble,

**All:** We will be blocking the best hope of this world.

**Leader:** If we welcome a child,

**All:** We will be welcoming you, O God.

**Leader:** Our Never-ending Hope,

**All:** The eternal God-child, even Jesus the Christ.

(From the United Methodist Women’s 2002 Assembly)

God our Mother and Father, we come to you as children.

Be with us as we learn to see one another with new eyes,

hear one another with new hearts,

and treat one another in a new way. Amen.

(Corrymeela Community, in *United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 463)

**Prayer for Leaders**

O God, as you anointed leaders and called prophets of old,

lead us to recognize our true representatives and authentic leaders:

men and women who love your people and can walk with them,

who feel their pain and share their joys,

who dream their dreams and strive to accompany them

to their common goal.

In your fire, with your Spirit, embolden and commission us

to transform our political system, to serve your people,

and to bring real glory to your name. Amen.

(Philippines, 20th Cent., in *United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 544)
**Benediction**

Go out into the world
to love children as God loves you,
To seek justice for children as God requires of you
To reveal your faith by what you do and how you live.

**Benediction**

Go forth to hear the voices of children made in God’s own image;
Go forth to bear the love of Christ who sided with the poor;
Go forth to seek justice as the Spirit moves in and through you.
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you and each child of God now and forever more. Amen.

**Prayers by Marian Wright Edelman**

**Grant Us a Vision In Our Time**

O God, grant us Your vision in our time.
Help us to write it so large that even a runner can see it.
Make it so compelling that even a cynic will pause,
so convincing that a skeptic will risk trying to bring hope to others,
and so inspiring that the committed will stand courageously in faith,
leaving the results to You.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

O God, help us to recover our hope for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our courage for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our discipline for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our ability to work together for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our values for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover a spirit of sacrifice for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our faith in You for our children’s sake.

(Marian Wright Edelman, *Guide My Feet*)

**The Measure of Success**

God, help our children to learn what is real. Help them not to defer to people because they are powerful or rich but because they are good or wise or helpful or loving.

Help them not to defer to people because they are attractive or famous but because they share a mission, a life view, a commitment to something bigger than themselves.

Help them not to defer to people because of race or gender but because they are principled and honest. Amen.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

O God, help our children to feel love and appreciation for all Your gifts of life.
Grant each of them a passion for peace and for justice, kindness for those who are weak and needy and sad and afraid, courage to stand up for right and to struggle against wrong, and friendship and kinship with all who share the world You have created. Grant our children faith to open the door of their souls wide to life and love as You intend. Protect them against the worms of hate and the weasels of selfishness and envy. Help our children to sing their own songs and to hear the songs of others in the spheres of the earth's firmament.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Children—God's Sacred Inheritance
Reduced by too many from God's inheritance to men's property to women's burden to society's problem to workforce commodity to a family value to political photo op and prop to fodder for military to corporate marketing taget to parent nagger and persuader valueless unless marketable valueless unless problemless valueless as vulnerable humans now valueless as God's special creation and messengers of hope valueless until adults.... But children are the seeds of heaven and stewards of tomorrow. God's inheritance squandered throughout the earth.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Oh I Am Who I Am, Hear the cries of Your children who are ravaged by violence, poverty, racism and neglect, scared, profiled, arrested, and imprisoned by those in authority
ignored by those with power as they languish in crumbling schools and neighborhoods
labeled often by some entrusted with their education as dumb, disruptive, retarded, and
failures
marginalized by those who vote and are elected because they cannot make campaign
contributions
resented by some of those forced to care for them in our often inhumane child welfare and
juvenile justice systems.
Hear our cries for our children, all-powerful God.
Fight their battles,
turn the hearts and transform the actions of those who will not let our children escape the
darkness of violence and drugs and poverty.
Open the Red Sea to their opportunity.
Send them Your manna in the wilderness and
lead us and our children into the promised land.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

God, please stop injustice,
the killing of innocent children
by violence at home and in far away lands.
God, please stop injustice,
the killing of innocent children
by poverty at home and abroad.
God, please stop injustice,
the assault on precious child dreams
by neglect and apathy near and far.
God, please stop injustice,
so our children may live
and love and laugh and play again.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

O God, forgive and transform our rich nation where small babies
die of cold quite legally.
O God, forgive and transform our rich nation where small children
suffer from hunger quite legally.
O God, forgive and transform our rich nation where toddlers and
school children die from guns sold quite legally.
O God, forgive and transform our rich nation that lets children be the poorest group of citizens quite legally.

O God, forgive and transform our rich nation that lets the rich continue to get more at the expense of the poor quite legally.

O God, forgive and transform our rich nation which thinks security rests in missiles and in bombs rather than in mothers and in babies.

O God, forgive and transform our rich nation for not giving You sufficient thanks by giving to others their daily bread.

O God, help us never to confuse what is quite legal with what is just and right in Your sight.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

God, is America’s dream big enough for me?  
For the little Black boy born the wrong color in the wrong place to the wrong parents in some folks’ sight?

God, is America’s justice fair enough for me?  
For the little Brown or White girl labeled from birth as second best?

God, is America’s economy open to us?  
For the many children who have to stay poor on the bottom so too few can stay rich on top?

God, does America have enough for me in a land of plenty for some, but of famine for others?

God, is America’s dream large enough for me?  
I who am poor, average, disabled, girl, Black, Brown, Native American, White?

Is America for me?

(By Marian Wright Edelman)
Sermon Resources for the Children’s Sabbath

October 21, 2018

Sermon Notes on the Lectionary Texts: The sermon or homily is one of the most powerful opportunities to proclaim God’s love and concern for all of God’s children and God’s call to us to put our faith into action by loving and protecting children. The lectionary texts designated for this Children’s Sabbath Sunday, October 21, 2018, offer deep connections and powerful messages related to the Children’s Sabbath themes. Even pastors who do not follow a lectionary will find rich food for thought and study in these sermon resources.

Sermon Notes on Other Passages: Of course, countless other biblical passages also illuminate our call to nurture and protect every child. For those who do not follow a lectionary, sermons may be sparked by the reflections in the 2018 Children’s Sabbath Seven Day Guide for Prayer and Reflection or by the meditations in Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children by Shannon Daley-Harris (available through the Children’s Defense Fund on-line store, Amazon, and other on-line sources.).

Children’s Sermon: A sample Children’s Sermon follows these sermon resources for use with the children of the congregation in a special conversation or “time with children.”

Sermon Notes on the Lectionary Texts

The following texts are the designated readings for the churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, the Episcopal Lectionary, the Lutheran Lectionary, and the Roman Catholic Lectionary, for the Sunday of Children’s Sabbath, October 21, 2018.

Job 38: 1–7 (34–41); Isaiah 53:4–12; Psalm 91:9-16 (or Psalm 104:1–9, 24, 35c); Hebrews 5:1–10; Mark 10:35–45

These Children’s Sabbath Sunday lectionary texts and the 2018 Children’s Sabbath focus on realizing Dr. King’s vision so that all children have lives of hope and not despair—with sufficient family income, not poverty; in the arms of loving family, not separated from them; with security, not the fear of gun violence in school or neighborhood. The lectionary texts present both opportunity and challenge for the preacher.

The opportunity is to acknowledge that suffering exists; all who care about children know too well that children suffer. Children in poverty face hunger, inadequate housing, and deficits in early childhood development; children are facing the terror of gun violence in school, home, and neighborhood; and hundreds of children still face the heartbreak of separation from family with whom they sought safety in our country—these and countless other children find themselves in despairing acceptance of a seemingly limited future.

Through Christ’s suffering with and even for us we know that God knows our pain intimately and loves us through it. Furthermore, we recognize through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ that God calls us as the body of Christ to serve the last, the least, and the left behind and stand with and for all children who suffer, embodying God’s love and will for justice.
The *challenge*, on the other hand, is to ensure that worshippers do not take away a message that suffering is simply to be accepted obediently and we should not ask the deep “why”s. In an age when we find it all too tempting to distract ourselves with nonstop entertainment, it would be tragic if Christians failed to hear the clear call to act vigorously to relieve the unnecessary and immoral suffering our indifference inflicts on innocent children. We may not be capable of ending all suffering, but we are surely called to end the suffering we can affect—and there is enough of that in our own communities to keep us busy for the rest of our lives.

**Job 38:1–7 (34–41)**

The book of Job begins with the question posed by the satan: Is Job faithful because of his good fortune? Will he lose faith when he loses those blessings? At its heart lies the question of suffering. Job speaks for all of us when he asks why people suffer. The Children’s Sabbath asks more particularly, why do children suffer, what does it mean for our faith, and how are we to respond in this world in which children suffer?

Throughout the book, we hear different approaches as those involved seek answers, from the three friends’ conventional wisdom and theology to Job’s challenging God to a debate in the style of a trial. Elihu offers unconventional answers as well. Finally, in our passage, God begins to provide a response. At the end of the book, however, we are not left with certainty that the divine speech is the definitive answer or with a clear understanding of what the “right” answer to the question of suffering is, in part because God affirms that Job has spoken rightly (42:7) and events turn out as the friends predicted. Notes Carol Newsome:

“To deny that there is a single definitive answer is not to say that one cannot gain insight into the problem of suffering in a world created by a loving God. What the book of Job models is a community of voices struggling to articulate a range of perspectives, each one of which contains valid insights as well as blindness to other dimensions of the problem. At different times and in different circumstances, one or another of the voices may seem more powerful, may be the word we need to hear in order to work our way through a particular experience. By refusing to give the book a neat resolution and declare one of the perspectives to be the solution, the book of Job draws us toward a recognition that our craving for an answer is an attempt to evade what we know to be true. Especially in times of religious crisis, richness of meaning and even a sense of peace are not to be found in a pre-packaged answer but emerge from wrestling with God.”

The book of Job raises the tension between our desire for a predictable world ordered by God that fulfills our expectations and the reality of unexpected events out of our control that create anxiety and uncertainty. In our passage from Job, God gives examples of God’s creative capacity beginning with laying the very foundation of the earth. Interestingly, the examples God gives underscore the existence of chaos in God’s creation. “Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?” (v. 8) We are reminded of not only God’s order but also the chaos that exists in our world.

Job gives voice to all of us who wonder about suffering in our world, all who wonder why, in the well-worn words, bad things happen to good people. When children suffer, especially, we are driven to ask with Job, why, why, why? How can one who is innocent, defenseless,
vulnerable be burdened with such suffering? How can nine million children be without health coverage and unable to see a doctor when they are sick or injured? How can 13.3 million live in poverty in the richest nation on earth? How can a Black boy born in 2001, who is just eight years old now, already face a one in three chance of imprisonment in his lifetime, or his Latino age-mate face one in five odds of imprisonment? How can this be? Where is God in all of this suffering?

God is where God has always been: God is with us. God’s heart is the first to break. Friends who give us alternative explanations may do so to comfort themselves, not to comfort us. The whole of the biblical witness is that God will go to any lengths to save us. And to be God’s followers is to go to any lengths to save those who suffer, especially those who do not have any capacity to save themselves.

At the end of the book of Job, as Job’s family and friends gather to share a meal, offer true comfort, and provide him money and gifts, we find that God works through us as the community to provide support and help restore the fortunes of those who have suffered.

Isaiah 53:4–12

Location Our passage is part of the fourth and last of the “servant songs.” This fourth servant song begins in Isaiah 52:13 and concludes with our text. The verses at the end of Chapter 52 state that the nations and their leaders will finally have their eyes opened, “So shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.” (52:15)

The passage immediately preceding our text tells of the servant in his earliest years: “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.” (53:2–3)

In our passage, which traditionally serves as the Old Testament reading for Good Friday, we encounter a portion of the fourth Servant Song that captures the major themes of the whole. One commentary notes, “1) The basic message is stated at the outset and reiterated in the conclusion (53:12a): God will vindicate and exalt his Suffering Servant. That point, not only in the original context but in all others, is a reversal of expectations, including those of the disciples in Mark 10:43–45. God’s power and authority are manifested in weakness; God acts through one whose suffering made him repulsive to all who saw him. 2) We are asked to identify with the life of the innocent sufferer, recounted here from youth (53:2) through a trial and death (53:7–8). 3) The servant’s life of suffering and humiliation is both vicarious and efficacious. It is on behalf of others, and it effectively removes their sin (53:6, 8, 12). 4) Not only will the servant be vindicated before the whole world, but also his suffering is on behalf of the transgressions of all (“the many,” 53:12).2

Turning Things Upside Down: Reversal of Expectations

The reversal of expectations noted in the first point provides a meaningful reinforcement of the message in the passage from Mark also designated by the lectionaries (see discussion
below) and relevant to the Children’s Sabbath. We have to let go of our world’s notions of the greatest and the least, the powerful and the powerless, the first and the last. The ones who suffer will be exalted. The last will be first. A little child will lead them.

We need to be able to open our eyes to God acting through those we least expect. Can we see God acting through the hurting children who call to us? Can we see God in the faces of children in poverty, in those who suffer hunger and lack of health care? Do we see Jesus, who as a child was taken in his parents arms as they fled the threat of danger from Herod into another country, in the face of children separated from their parents at our border? Do we see Jesus, himself the victim of violence at the hands of an unjust empire, in the faces of those living in fear of violence? If the life of Jesus has shown us anything at all, it is that God is most likely to be present to us in the most unexpected of persons, and to call us to a ministry borne not of power but of love.

Can we accept the invitation not to power or safety or comfort, but to servant leadership, risk, and even our own suffering? Are we ready to turn things upside down? Are our nation and its leaders ready to see and finally comprehend the nature of servanthood?

### Identifying with the Innocent Sufferer

Many children and youths might well identify with the experience of the suffering servant. Too many of our children are trying to take root and grow in the dry ground of poverty, dangerous, substandard housing, unsafe neighborhoods and schools, abuse and neglect, and lack of health care and mental health care, with the support of their families but the indifference or worse of our nation. Struggling just to survive rather than thrive, too many of our children have no outward “form or majesty;” our casual glance sees not a child of God but a scrawny kid, a sickly or wheezing teenager, a baby dulled forever by lead poisoning, a child tormented by depression or other untreated mental illness. Too many of our children and youths are despised and rejected, feel society’s contempt and rejection that allows it to accept poverty as their lot, to observe preventable illness and deprivation without taking action, to assume prison as an acceptable outcome for so many. Far, far too many of our children have suffered and are acquainted with illness and infirmity. If you look at the plight of the more than one thousand children and teens killed by guns each year without meaningful community, state, and national action to prevent it, you might agree that their lives are “held…of no account.” If you look at the plight of our nation’s one in five children who is poor in our rich nation with the resources to end it, you might agree that they are “held…of no account.” If you consider the children severed from their families as they entered our country, you might agree that they are “held…of no account.”

While children in our nation today are suffering, and may identify with the suffering of the servant, our passage does not ask them to suffer. Although the suffering of children in our nation today is because of others, we cannot say of our children that it is on behalf of others. That is, our children are not meant to be suffering servants because of our apathy, inaction, and lack of care. Their suffering is neither vicarious nor efficacious—it is not on our behalf and it does not remove our sin. Rather, it highlights the sin of a nation that does not protect the young, weak, and powerless. It is we who are adults, it is we who are strong, it is we who are powerful that are called to servant leadership and to make the suffering of others our own. The plain truth is that we either respond to that call, or we reject it. The integrity of our faith lies in the balance—our
very ability to say we are “Christian” without taking the name of the Lord in vain.

**Psalm 91:9–16**

This psalm’s assurance of God’s protection against enemies, disease or sickness, and all evil (v. 3, 10) stands in tension with the reality that illness does strike us, even children, even the “innocent,” even the faithful. With the reality that every day, through no fault of their own, small children are endangered by the enemy of poverty that chases them from an empty breakfast table, through substandard housing, through unsafe neighborhoods, to a failing school, and is waiting when the school day is over to continue to hunt and haunt them. With the reality that every two days, the equivalent of a classroom full of children and teens are killed by guns. With the reality that thousands of children bear the trauma of separation from their families when they crossed our border seeking safety and even now some have not been returned to their parents’ arms.

Standing in the good news of the resurrection’s ultimate triumph over death and promise of new life in the Risen Christ we can trust in that final assurance that “Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation.”

**Hebrews 5:1–10**

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” (5:7) This passage is a powerful reminder that in Christ we have one who knows first-hand what it means, in the flesh, to be human. He probably winced over a stubbed toe, grimaced when a sharp rock sliced into his foot. He may have known the throb of a toothache. We know that he suffered the most extreme pain and suffering on the cross.

Having been in the flesh, Christ knows what it is like for children today who gasp for breath against asthma’s tight grip. He knows what it means for a baby crawling in a lead-laced apartment to stick chubby fingers in her mouth and become lead poisoned over time. He knows what it is like for an uninsured child to go years without seeing a doctor or dentist. He knows what it is like for a child to be in aching need of medical care but have parents who delay seeking it because they don’t have the money. He knows what it is like for a youth to be in a pit of depression so deep that no one hears the cries for help. He knows what it is like to experience hunger and poverty, to be reviled and rejected, to be imprisoned and accused. He knows. He knows. He knows us and our hurts from the days of his flesh.

In Christ we have one who knows what it means to pray for relief, to pray for release from pain, to pray for an end to suffering. When we offer up prayers for ourselves or for children who hurt, who are haunted by mental illness without care, who endure worsening conditions without needed treatments, Christ hears our prayers as one who has offered up his own prayers and supplications. When we sit hour after hour in an emergency room, finally seeking treatment that can no longer be delayed, with fervent prayers in our hearts, Christ hears. When we face unpayable bills and wonder in anguish how we will keep our children fed and housed, Christ hears. When we anguish over children who are accused and imprisoned or have been torn from the arms of loving parents, Christ understands.
Christ knows what it means to scream prayers for healing in anguish. To yell prayers for relief in anger. To shout loud prayers that demand answers. To sob prayers for healing in desperation. To cry prayers for the end to our child’s suffering. To whisper prayers for hope when despair is overwhelming. To have a prayer so big that it can’t even fit into words. Christ knows.

Christ knows, first-hand, from his own prayers and supplications, with his own loud cries and tears, that faith does not spare us from suffering but that we can trust in God’s steadfast presence through it all.

This passage is frequently used in ordination ceremonies and goes to the heart of the question of vocation. From it, on this Children’s Sabbath day, we may ask ourselves what it will mean for each of us to serve, to minister to children as ones who know first-hand their hurts, their prayers for help, and their tears and cries for relief.

Mark 10:35–45

**Location** The location of our passage from Mark is worth noting for it reinforces a consistent witness to the nature of the ministry and service to which we are called. Earlier in this chapter we find that well-known passage in which Jesus instructs his disciples to let the children come to him, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. That scene is followed by Jesus’ instructions on wealth and discipleship, and then we begin the third and final passion prediction in the verses immediately preceding this lectionary passage. Immediately following our passage is the healing of blind Bartimaeus. In just one chapter we encounter Jesus’ teaching on the importance of serving those who are young, poor, and in need of healing.

Turning now to our passage, there are two themes that emerge and lend themselves to preaching on the Children’s Sabbath: suffering and servant leadership

**Theme of Suffering** James and John are looking for glory and good times, and Jesus asks them if they are prepared to drink the cup that he drinks and be baptized with the water that he is baptized with. The cup is a powerful metaphor for suffering, recalling for the reader the blood Jesus will shed, his anguished prayer to God that the cup might pass from him if God wills, and even Old Testament references to the cup as a metaphor for divine wrath. (The New Interpreters Bible, Vol. VII, p. 653) Linked in this passage with the cup, baptism too becomes a metaphor for suffering (with its own echoes of the overwhelming flood in Ps. 42, 69, and Isa. 43). James and John’s glib assurances that they are able are met with Jesus’ somber affirmation that they will indeed share that cup and baptism. And, although they do abandon Jesus at the end of his days, they will indeed later share his suffering.

There are important connections to be made on this Children’s Sabbath, which looks at the ways that poverty harms children and the anguish of their parents who struggle every day to make ends meet. Reports CDF, “Being exposed to poverty during childhood has lifelong negative consequences. It impairs cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development from the earliest years. It increases the risk for developmental delays, poor school performance, and behavioral issues. Poor children are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be unemployed, earn less as adults, and become involved in the criminal justice system. Poverty also increases children’s risk of hunger, illness, and homelessness.” Such suffering is preventable and needless. Notes CDF, “It doesn’t have to be this way. We as a nation know
what works. We know what to do. We can end child poverty by investing in policies and programs to increase employment for families with children, may work pay, and ensure children’s basic needs are met. We must honor the 50th anniversary of Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign by realizing his vision and leveling the playing field for all children in America.”

We who would follow Christ are called to share his passion and his compassion—his suffering with and even for others. Do we share the suffering of children in poverty and their parents who struggle every day to make ends meet? The suffering of children torn from parents’ arms as they sought safety in our land? The suffering of children and teens who are daily haunted by the threat of gun violence in school or neighborhood? Are we feeling that pain as our own and responding as we would to our own? Are we bringing a message to all children who suffer that God knows and shares their pain, God is present with them and will not abandon them even in their most painful times?

**Theme of Servant Leadership** The second theme that emerges in this passage is servant leadership. Jesus chides, “*You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.*” (Vv. 42–45) The disciples were as susceptible as most of us are to being influenced by conventional notions of status, standing, honor, and power. That’s why angling for the best seats seemed important to James and John, and why the other disciples were so upset about being one-upped. Do you recall one of the disciples’ earlier arguments about who was the greatest, in Mark 9:33–37? Jesus responded to that argument, “*Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all,*” and then put a child among them and took it in his arms saying, “*Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.*”

Such a lesson was—and is—hard to absorb, running so counter to the world’s reckoning of who is important, who has priority. In the very next chapter of Mark, the disciples still view children as lowly annoyances not worthy of Jesus’ time, so that again he must instruct the disciples to let the children come to him, for in fact the kingdom of God belongs to such as these—those without power, standing, pride of place, or prestige in the world’s eyes. How hard it is for us to remember that when for six and a half days a week we hear and witness exactly the opposite! No wonder true discipleship is so difficult—so very, very difficult.

In fact, Jesus’ instructions on servant leadership and true greatness are found throughout all four gospels in several places in each: Matt. 20:24–27; 23:11; Mark 9:35; Luke 9:48; 22:24—27; John 12:24–26; 13:12–16; 15:20. It was clearly a message that the earliest followers, and we who would be followers today, need to hear.

In our day, as in Jesus’, those who are young, poor, without power are likely to be trampled in the stampede for the best seats, the most power, the most privilege, the most wealth, the greatest advantage.

The needs of children in America, especially the needs of one in six children in poverty, the children and teens terrified at the real threat of gun violence, the children traumatized by border separations, call us to demonstrate our greatness through servant leadership and
service. We know that this country can afford to give them what they need. What we cannot afford is to look the other way, hiding from our calling or feeling that we are not equal to the task. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

Mother Teresa, who embodied servant leadership and greatness through service, once said, “Prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions by giving your time”. Sometimes this may mean doing something physical (such as we do in our homes for the sick and dying) or sometimes it may mean offering spiritual support for the shut-ins... If an ill person wants medicine, then give him medicine; if he needs comfort, then comfort him.

The service we are called to is not only to reach out with a touch of love, but also to change the structures and systems that are hurting and failing children. When children are the poorest group of Americans, when 13.2 million children are poor, there is a need for change to our nation’s structures and systems. When the odds are stacked against our nation’s Black, Latino, and poor children, shunting so many of them into the pipeline to prison, we need to change that system that works against their success and positive futures. When thousands of teens and children lose their lives to guns each year, we need commonsense gun safety laws and other steps to protect children, not guns. When desperate families from other countries are fleeing to us for protection, we need systems in place that don’t cause more harm and trauma... If an ill person wants medicine, then give him medicine; if he needs comfort, then comfort him.

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We recall finally the words of St. Francis of Assisi that speak to the profound reversals of first and last, serving and being served, that Jesus calls us to:

Lord, make me a channel of Thy peace,
That where there is hatred, I may bring love;
That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;
That where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
That where there is error, I may bring truth;
That where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
That where there is despair, I may bring hope;
That where there are shadows, I may bring light;
That where there is sadness, I may bring joy;
Lord, grant that I may seek rather than to comfort than to be comforted;
Children’s Message

Today is Children’s Sabbath, a special weekend to celebrate how wonderful children are, but also a time to remember children and families who have big problems, like not enough money for food or homes or doctor visits. Children’s Sabbath is a time to learn and pray and talk about how God wants us to make all children’s lives better.

In the Bible, there are lots of stories about children and families who are having a tough time and about the people who try hard to help families and keep children safe. When Jesus himself was a baby, his parents had to work hard to find a safe place where King Herod wouldn’t hurt him.

King Herod was worried that when baby Jesus grew up, he would change things and King Herod wouldn’t be in charge any more. The wise men decided not to tell King Herod where baby Jesus was, even though King Herod would be mad—that was brave of them to do the right thing even when it was hard to do!

When baby Jesus’ parents learned that King Herod was looking for baby Jesus, they took him to a far-away place where they knew their baby would be safe. They were brave and loving and very determined to keep their baby safe. And you know what? When Jesus grew up, he did change things! His friends learned that following God is more important than following the King.

Long before baby Jesus was born, Moses was a baby and he, like all of the Jewish boys at the time, was in danger from the Pharaoh—who was like the king. The Pharaoh was being very unfair to the Jewish people and he didn’t want the children to grow up and change things to make it fair. Moses’ mother and sister were very smart and brave and they came up with a plan to keep baby Moses safe from the Pharaoh: They hid him in a basket that they gently placed in the river where he could float safely until he was rescued. A woman nearby saw baby Moses floating in the water and wanted to help keep him safe and to take care of him. The mother, the sister, and the neighbor each did their part to be sure that the baby wasn’t hurt and to take good care of him so he could grow up safely. And you know what? When Moses grew up, he did change things so the Pharaoh had to stop being unfair and let the Jewish people be free the way God wanted.

Even today, there are lots of families who are raising children in neighborhoods that aren’t safe and have lots of problems. Those parents worry and work hard to keep their children safe from harm. We can all work together to keep all children safe, like the people in the Bible stories worked together to keep baby Jesus and baby Moses safe. If follow God and work together to make things fair for everyone and keep all children safe, children can grow up and keep
changing the world to make it better.

Let’s pray. Dear God, thank you for showing us through Bible stories how you want it to be—that children are kept safe from the things that could hurt them so they can grow up the way you want them to. Thank you for showing us we can make the world better by working together as leaders and parents and sisters and brothers and neighbors. Help us to live the way you want and to be your partners in making the world better for children and for all of us. Amen.