

## **Worship resources for Criminal Justice Sunday**

By Pat Lucy\*

### **BIBLE STUDY HELPS FOR PERSONS WHO ARE INCARCERATED**

God so loved the world we were given God's own son to show the way.

#### **YOU HAVE BEEN CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD; GOD CALLS YOU GOOD**

God created humankind in God's own image, in the image of God they were created; male and female, God created them. God blessed them...and saw that everything that had been made was very good. Genesis 1:27-31

#### **GOD IS WITH YOU ALWAYS**

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

#### **GOD CALLS YOU BY NAME AND LOVES YOU**

Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. You are precious in my sight and honored. I love you. You are my witnesses and my servants whom I have chosen. Isaiah 43:1a, 4a, and 10a

#### **YOU WERE CREATED AND CHOSEN TO BE A BLESSING TO THE WHOLE WORLD**

The Lord said to Abram, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:2

#### **GOD EXPECTS YOU TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD BY LOVING KINDNESS AND DOING JUSTICE**

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

#### **DON'T JUDGE OTHERS**

Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. And in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Matthew 7:1-2, Luke 6:37

#### **GOD EXPECTS TO COME FIRST, BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE IN YOUR LIFE** No one can serve two masters. Matthew 6:24

#### **YOUR REAL FAMILY IS MADE UP OF THOSE WHO FOLLOW JESUS**

Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, is my brother, sister and mother.  
Matthew 12:48-50, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21

#### DO FOR OTHERS WHAT YOU WISH THEY WOULD DO FOR YOU

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you,  
pray for those who abuse you. Do to others as you would have them do to you.  
Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:27-35

#### GOD WILL GIVE YOU STRENGTH

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with  
wings like eagles: they shall run and not be weary: they shall walk and not be  
faint. Isaiah 40:31

#### THE POWER OF GOD IS LOVE

If I have faith...but do not have love, I am nothing...Love is patient and kind. Love  
is not envious or boastful or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. It is not  
irritable or resentful. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the  
right. Love bears, believes and hopes in all that is holy. Love never ends. Faith,  
hope, love, abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.  
1 Corinthians 13

#### BODY IS A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which  
you have from God, and that you are not your own? 1 Corinthians 6:19

#### OUR JOB IS TO LIVE AND TO WORK WITH AND TO LOVE OTHERS

Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and to good deeds, not  
neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one  
another. Hebrews 10:24-25

#### YOUR ATTITUDE AND HOW YOU ACT WILL TELL OTHERS WHAT YOU BELIEVE

The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22

#### WOMEN AND MEN ARE EQUAL BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITH

There are no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.  
Galatians 5:22

#### RULES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another  
with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be  
ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering,  
persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to  
strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:9-21

## **Sojourner Tales Vignettes from jail**

### **Mary**

Mary had weighed the cost of divorcing an abusive husband and it was heavy; yet she never regretted leaving him. She was in her 50's and had waited far too long. She knew the choice she made had a name - poverty. She would live the rest of her life hoping the month would run out before the money did. Not often, but more than once, small checks were written at the end of the month with great hopes that the check didn't hit the bank until she could get her small pay check into the account.

She had found a small house for less rent and she was in the middle of a move. She didn't want her ex to find her, so she left no forwarding address. The check she wrote didn't beat the deposit. The notice of insufficient funds and the court papers of charges filed never reached her.

Four years later, driving with a friend who had allowed her license tag to expire, a police stop picked up a no-show warrant for Mary's arrest. She was in jail immediately. The Public Defender wearily tried to convince the judge, again, that those living in poverty had no hope of paying the large fines that were being set. There was little doubt that she, like many others, would be brought back to jail. The cost to the county of all this jail time would be far more than the fine and would further destabilize her. The judge was not sympathetic. He had had his fill of bad check stories. He was convinced that the epidemic must be stopped. He set her fine at over \$5,000.

Now, at sixty, she has been in jail for over 4 months, waiting a hearing on her new situation. She has lost her house and her car and she doesn't know where her belongings are. She had never been a very resourceful woman and now her poverty had deepened.

The check Mary had written over 4 years ago was for \$44.

**Prayer:** *God of new beginnings, we lift up Mary and all those in similar situations. Grant her a sense of your abiding love and presence; infuse her with hope that is not dependent on external events but the sure knowledge that she is your beloved child. Amen.*

### **Jeanne**

Jeanne was a pretty young girl waiting for a 'friend' to bail her out. She probably came to Bible study because she was bored. We were discussing barter as a way to alleviate poverty. The conversation took a quick turn when several gals shared that the best paying commodity to barter was sex. There were murmurs of agreement.

Night time work is good for single moms. For those who have to rely on 'iffy' care, sleeping children usually do not annoy folks who are combining their sitting with partying or even solo drinking or drug use. They agreed, however, that their pastors found that this profession easily met the standard of sinful female behavior. Soon, weird experiences were shared, most of which were eye openers for me, but Jeanne topped them all.

She had been standing (soliciting) on a darkened median which was commonly known to support this 'barter trade.' A nice car came by with darkened windows and a conversation ensued in which price and time were agreed upon. She stepped into the car and found she had just made a contract with her pastor. I never heard the end of that story because the laughter was quick and spontaneous.

The discussion which followed was based on a mutual agreement that within the church, hypocrisy abounds. Isn't it amazing how many people can come to the same conclusion from such a variety of experiences?

**Prayer:** *God of Compassion, help us to create communities where no one is obliged to sell their body to feed their children or put a roof over their heads. Amen.*

### **"Annie"**

She could have tried out for Annie in the stage show. Wild and curly red hair, freckles and an earnest look on her face. That morning, I was asking my group what they knew about the slave trade. "I know," she said. "When I was 14, my parents were mad at me and I just ran. It was dark and some guy, about 50, asked me if I needed a ride somewhere. I needed a ride but I didn't have a clue as to where I was going. So, when he offered me a place to stay until I could decide

what to do, it seemed like a good deal. One thing led to another and it wasn't long before I was part of Tulsa's slave trade.

She was proud that she was on her own now – got to keep all the money she earned – and she liked the highs of alcohol and drugs. She was 27 now and had learned the hard way how to stay safe on the streets. She had been in jail often, and expected to be out in a couple of days; but, there she was next week. She was excited because she had “found Jesus and cleaned up her act.” She had been in touch with a wonderful man in Texas who offered her a place to make a fresh start. He was gentle and kind and a Christian. She would be out in a couple of days and she was heading to Texas with Jesus. She was sure that Jesus and this new 50 year old new friend would turn her life around.

***Prayer:*** *May God wrap healing wings around this woman/child and keep her safe. May someone, somewhere, pull her from the trap she almost certainly is going into – again. And all of us be aware that this story is universal – around the world – and that the United States is a major player in the international slave trade. Amen.*

### **Unnamed Woman**

It was All Saints Day. I had asked the group to think of someone who had loved them unconditionally - someone who would speak truth to them; someone they knew that they wished they could be like. One by one, we named them and told stories of those who created memories of love and acceptance for us.

A newcomer, sitting as far away from everyone as she could possibly get, sat silently, eyes downcast, with a sullen look on her face. Overweight, she looked uncomfortable in the ugly plastic chairs that are provided for us. Her dyed blonde hair was greasy and hung lankly around her face which showed no mark of emotion.

As we got ready to raise our list of names to God with prayers of gratitude, I turned to the quiet lady and asked if she had a name she would like to share. Looking at me for the first time, I saw her eyes were filled with pain. “I never known anyone like that,” she said quietly and without another word, she stood and shuffled out of the room before anyone could make a move.

***Prayer:*** *God of grace and compassion, make your presence known to this hurting child of yours. Let her feel the warmth and care of the angels dressed in orange that sit in circle with her. Give us patience to*

*deal with her pain. Help her to open her heart to just one of us so that she might feel the reality and power of your love.*

*God of all creation: help us live our lives in such a way that no one we meet will ever utter words such as we heard that day. Give us power and strength.*

*Let it be so.*

### **“Belinda”**

There’s not much I can do for my ladies, but I can call ministers and Belinda wanted me to call Pastor Tom. “I belong to his church. It’s a Bible-based church and he told me all about Jesus. Please call him and tell him I really want to see him.” The cheery secretary at the church remembered Belinda and said she’d get the message to Pastor Tom. But he didn’t come. He was there when I called again. Oh, he did get my message but he was so busy. There was a building program. “You’re a pastor”, he said. “You know how busy the Lenten season is; so much programming. I’ll try to get by and see her.” He hasn’t made it yet nor has he sent anyone else.

Here are some ‘Bible-based’ words: “What does the Lord require of you? To do justice and love kindness.” And then there is that troublesome stuff that Jesus tells us, you remember? “Love one another as I have loved you.” And wasn’t it Jesus who said something about visiting those in prison?

Perhaps Pastor Tom will place the stone within his heart onto the pile of bricks before his expanding church – and find time to visit Belinda.

***Prayer:*** *God of justice and mercy, help those who minister in your name to minister with the heart and humility of Jesus. Amen.*

### **Noah’s Parents**

Noah was born with multiple birth defects and lived to be just six weeks old. The symptoms of Noah’s deformity mimicked child abuse and the doctor was obliged to contact the authorities. When Noah died, his parents had already been in jail for a week, charged with abusing him. Now, the charge was murder.

A year later, Noah’s parents remain in jail and their two other children stay with relatives in another state. They anxiously wait for a trial which will make a legal decision whether Noah died of abuse or from the multiple birth defects with which he was born. Last month, the

mother received word that the prosecutors had offered her husband a 'deal' if he would testify that she had abused the child. A trial date has been set. A jury will now decide.

***Prayer:*** *God of compassion and justice, be with this family as it endures multiple tragedies. Give the court wisdom to listen carefully and judge fairly. Make your presence known to this family so they might have the strength and courage to find your peace and your purpose for their lives, whatever the outcome will be. Amen.*

## **SAMPLE WORSHIP SERVICE**

Worship starts with setting the symbols of the faith on an empty worship/communion table at center front.

As folks come into worship, designate one to bring in each of the symbols and place them on the table.

### **PRESENTING THE SYMBOLS OF THE FAITH**

**ANGELS:** The worship table is covered with a cloth full of angels. It reminds us that we should always be on the lookout for the angels God sends to walk with us on our faith journey. The angels on the worship table remind us that God may be calling you to be an angel in the circumstances of your life.

We have used a cotton cloth made from a print filled with angels. An alternative might be to place 2 or 3 angel figures on the table.

**BIBLE:** Placing the open Bible in the center of the worship table reminds us that the word of God tells us how to walk with Jesus.

**BELLS:** The sound of the bells reminds us that we are always in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We have a banner with bells; an alternative could involve hanging individual bells from rainbow colored ribbons. Run your fingers through the bells whenever you need to remind your congregation that the Spirit is with them.

**TISSUE/KLEENEX:** The Tissue/Kleenex on God's table reminds us that God is with us in our times of trouble. We remember that God knows our pain and is with us, but more than that; we know that God sends angels to be with us when we cry. You may be one of those angels.

(In a jail setting, the only tissue available is toilet paper. It is quite jarring to place that on a worship table – but, in fact, it is the only tissue inmates have. We often opt to put Kleenex on the table because it is such a treat for our congregants to

have soft tissue in hand.)

### **THE CANDLES OF THE TRINITY: A Litany**

(We are not allowed to use candles so we use battery votive candles.)

**VOICE 1:** We light candles to remind us that in all things we have chosen to hope rather than to curse the darkness.

We light a candle in the name of the Creator who formed the world good and created us in God's own image.

**VOICE 2:** God above us.

(lighting the candle and placing it on the worship table)

**VOICE 1:** We light a candle in the name of Jesus who came to show us the way and to be a light before us.

**VOICE 2:** God with us.

(lighting the candle and placing it on the worship table)

**VOICE 1:** We light a candle in the name of the Spirit who enters our hearts and minds and strengthens us to do the right thing.

**VOICE 2:** God around us.

(lighting the candle and placing it on the worship table)

**SONG:** "Holy Ground"

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

God of all creation, we feel your presence among us. Hear us as we pray:

God of Spirit

Blow the winds of truth through us.

Open us to the change your truth reveals to us.

God of Wisdom

Teach us to delight in our differences,

Help us to trust and find strength in one another.

God of Power

Free our dreams

Awaken our souls to your presence.



God of Compassion

Open our ears to the suffering of others,  
Release our minds to your mystery.  
Unlock our hearts to the goodness of life.

God, hear our prayer.

Let us worship the God of goodness, strength and compassion who loves us unconditionally.

## **SONG**

SENDING OUT GOD'S BLESSING BEARERS

(author unknown)

Christ has no body now on earth but ours  
No hands but ours  
No feet but ours  
Ours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion will look upon the world

Children of hope and bearers of God's blessings

Go now from this sacred place knowing

- God goes before you, to lead you in the Way.
- God goes behind you, to encourage you.
- God goes above you, to bless you.
- God goes beneath you, to support you.
- God goes next to you, to befriend you.
- God goes within you, to empower you,

So that you may live your as the person God created you to be.

\*Pat Lucy, cradle Presbyterian, lay pastor (Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery) and College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa commissioned to serve the women of the Tulsa's jail, (Tulsa Criminal Justice Center). I serve as an assistant to the Jail Chaplain. This month, I start my eleventh year providing weekly bible studies and 2nd Sunday worships, the only liturgical worship at the jail. I was, for seven years, an attorney in family practice, specialty, juvenile court. I have served on the Board of Directors of the Presbyterian Health, Education & Welfare Association (PHEWA).

I also provide reading glasses, as many as 100 pairs a month (purchased at the local Dollar Tree) and distribute Bibles provided by the Gideons.

I am married, have two living children, five grandchildren, and a very small

dog that adores me. I am a graduate of Oklahoma University and Tulsa Law School. I have served the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in various capacities at all levels of the church.

## **Reflections by Pat Lucy on her jail ministry, in the providing of these worship resources**

We have more people in jail in this country than almost any other country on earth. The building and maintaining of prisons is one of the fastest growing industries in the United States. And there are more women in jail, per capita, in Oklahoma than any other state in the union – or anywhere else in the world.

Tulsa County's jail, the David L. Moss Criminal Justice Center is less than ten years old and holds 1,400 incarcerates. Approximately 300 are women, housed in 3 pods, each designed for 90. About 20 others are housed in the medical unit and a segregated unit. Every prisoner in the facility is waiting – for an arraignment, for someone to bail them out, for trial, transportation to prison, some have done nothing but are being held as a material witness in a trial. The 'crimes' which have brought them to this place range from something like not showing for a court date (for any violation), not paying fines which the court has assessed – right up to robbery and even murder – murder, sometimes even the murder of their own child.

Hearing stories of abuse, neglect, poverty, and violence that so often are a part of my Bible studies in the jail, I leave thanking God for the goodness that has permeated my life. But one question always lingers – why is it that I was born into such good circumstances – this country, this time, my loving parents, and my special skills – born into the strong fabric of a broad community of God – while others are born into miserable circumstances – in extreme poverty and all that it means as to education, nurturing, health care, and spiritual growth – born to drug or alcohol-using parents and all the residual harm that brings? For the most part, they have been born into the toxic environments of poverty that makes life threatening choices almost inevitable – lethal environments untouched by the reality of God's presence in the community. One in four American children is raised in this bone-crunching poverty. All I know is that the Bible is clear. It is not God's judgment that such things happen. It happens because we refuse to see it.

It is easy for us to make judgments about jail people. People have choices, you think, and they have made all the bad ones. Most, but surely not all of us, were given a better selection of choices than my jail ladies. I asked them what they would say to you if they were with me this morning. "Tell them," they said, "that we are women of faith who are not so different from them. Tell them that many of us are here as a result of bad choices – but tell them many of us have been abused since childhood and most of us have always lived in poverty. Often choices made in poverty are not ones you would wish to have. Most of us work minimum wage jobs, but it's not enough. We want them to know that morality looks a lot different when your kids have to go to bed hungry and your husband has just beaten you to the ground. Tell them many of us don't have family to fall back on."

They tell me I would be surprised by how many 'Christian' men – police officers, lawyers, bail bondsmen, and even some members of their own churches were willing to 'barter' their help for sexual favors. They cried when they told me how scared they were when they held sick children in their arms all night and they had no money to buy medicine, or sometimes no car to get to the emergency room for a long wait that could cost them their job. "Tell them," they said, "how hard it is when our children come home from school in their used clothing with tales of the names they have been called, and sometimes by teachers, and sometimes by children with WWJD bracelets on their arms."

I don't have the answers but I do know this: If the fabric of God's shalom had been extended into the poison places where most of the jail population has been raised, most of these women would not be where they are. Each of us has problems, many of which are as profound and debilitating as those in the jail population, but these women have had few if any resources on which to build a decent life.

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