

**Theological Education Sunday  
September 15, 2019  
Liturgy Resources  
Created by Rev. Mary Kathleen Duncan and Rev. Leigh Stuckey  
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**Suggested Text for your church bulletin, e-newsletter or printed newsletter**

Today we celebrate Theological Education Sunday in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Please join us in praying for the Church's future ministers, and look for opportunities to mentor those among us who have gifts for ministry. Our Church supports future ministers who are Presbyterian students at PC(USA) seminaries through The Theological Education Fund (TEF). Recently housed at the Presbyterian Foundation, the TEF channels gifts of Presbyterians and their congregations to Presbyterian seminaries and, thereby, invests in the future of Christ's church. To donate and find out more about the Theological Education Fund, visit the Presbyterian Foundation web site, which you can find at [www.presbyterianfoundation.org/tef](http://www.presbyterianfoundation.org/tef).

**What is Theological Education Sunday?**

We set aside Theological Education Sunday as a day to recognize and give thanks for ministries of theological education throughout our church. We recall that education is central to our identity as Presbyterians and hope you will join us as we pray for the future educators and ministers within the PC(USA). Theological Education Sunday is sponsored by the Theological Education Fund (TEF) and Committee on Theological Education and is designated by the PC(USA) as an emphasis on September 15, 2019, or whenever your congregation chooses to celebrate.

Those discerning a call to ministry are supported through the TEF. In particular, the Fund combines gifts from individuals, congregations, and mid-councils to support Presbyterian seminaries and seminarians. Join us in prayer, and as you are able, in a special financial offering to the Fund. Through your support the 11 seminaries and countless seminarians are able to step into leadership in the Presbyterian Church. A gift to TEF is an act of faith in the future of our congregations, denomination and its leadership.

**The Themes of the Service**

Today we explore themes of wisdom, providence, and God's reign. The overarching theme is the counter-intuitive *arithmetic of God*, a system which prioritizes the lost one over the profit-bearing 99, the foolishness of confession and sacrifice over the status quo exercise of worldly rites and rituals. God's economy differs greatly from our common practice and calls us to live into divine foolishness which pursues justice and righteousness over any and all self-serving pursuits.

## Preparation for the Day — Quotes to Consider

“Facts, facts, facts ... they are everywhere about me. I know with my mind the meaning of many choices that I make. Besides there are many sources upon which I may draw for information that will be the raw material of my decisions. But facts are not the heart of my need. I need wisdom. The quality that will make clear to me the significance, the relatedness of things that are a part of my daily experience—this I lack again and again. I need wisdom to cast a slow and ready radiance over all my landscape in order that things, choices, deeds may be seen in their true light—the light of the eternal and the timeless. The wisdom of God—how can I abide without it?”

— Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (Beacon Press, 1953), p. 207

“Wisdom is not gained by knowing what is right. Wisdom is gained by practicing what is right, and noticing what happens when the practice succeeds and when it fails. Wise people do not have to be certain what they believe before they act. They are free to act, trusting that the practice itself will teach them what they need to know.”

— Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (HarperOne, 2010), p. 14

“To every age Christ dies anew and is resurrected within the imagination of [humanity]. This is why he could be a paragon of rationality for 18th-century England, a heroic figure of the imagination for the Romantics, an exemplar of existential courage for writers like Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann. [...] A deeper truth, though, one that scripture suggests when it speaks of the eternal Word being made specific flesh, is that there is no permutation of humanity in which Christ is not present. If every Bible is lost, if every church crumbles to dust, if the last believer in the last prayer opens her eyes and lets it all finally go, Christ will appear on this earth as calmly and casually as he appeared to the disciples walking to Emmaus after his death, who did not recognize this man to whom they had pledged their very lives; this man whom they had seen beaten, crucified, abandoned by God; this man who, after walking the dusty road with them, after sharing an ordinary meal and discussing the scriptures, had to vanish once more in order to make them see.”

— Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (FSG Adult, 2014)

“God is the comic shepherd who gets more of a kick out of that one lost sheep once he finds it again than out of the 90 and nine who had the good sense not to get lost in the first place. God is the eccentric host who, when the country-club crowd all turn out to have other things more important to do than come live it up with him, goes out into the skid rows and soup kitchens and charity wards and brings home a freak show. The man with no legs who sells shoelaces at the corner. The old woman in the moth-eaten fur coat who makes her daily rounds of the garbage cans. The old wino with his pint in a brown paper bag. The pusher, the whore, the village idiot who stands at the blinker light waving his hand as the cars go by. They are seated at the damask-laid table in the great hall. The candles are all lit and the champagne glasses filled. At a sign from the host, the musicians in their gallery strike up “*Amazing Grace*.” If you have to explain it, don’t

bother.”

— Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (Harper & Row, 1977)

“The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,  
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.  
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,  
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,  
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!  
The endless cycle of ideas and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.  
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,  
But nearness to death no nearer to God.  
Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
The cycles of Heaven in 20 centuries  
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.”  
— T. S. Eliot, excerpted from choruses from *The Rock*, 1934

### **Scriptures for the Day (Revised Common Lectionary)**

#### Semi-continuous Readings

Jeremiah 4:11–12, 22–28  
Psalm 14  
1 Timothy 1:12–17  
Luke 15:1–10

#### Complementary Readings

Exodus 32:7–14  
Psalm 51:1–10  
1 Timothy 1:12–17  
Luke 15:1–10

#### Call to Worship (Psalm 14)

The Lord looks down from heaven  
to see if there are any who are wise,  
who seek after God.

**We have all gone astray,  
we have sought gods of our own creation,**

**and failed to do good.**

Still God brings delivery to Zion.

God restores the fortunes of the foolish.

God brings gladness to Israel!

**Let us worship God!**

Call to Confession

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. As those with knowledge of this truth, let us approach the throne of grace with the confidence and assurance that God welcomes us, God hears us, God sits at the ready to redeem us. As those who recognize our sinfulness, let us confess together.

Prayer of Confession

**Steadfast God,**

**we acknowledge that you deserve all the world's honor and glory.**

**We confess our failure to wholeheartedly join creation's chorus of praise to you.**

**Rather than living as the very good beings you deemed us to be,  
we sin, we fall short, we miss the mark.**

**We are stiff-necked in our certainties,  
causing hurt to our fellow human beings.**

**We allow our foolishness to over-power your truth,  
thus promoting lies throughout the earth.**

**Not only do we lack understanding;**

**we are unable to truly seek it,**

**and we lay waste to your blessings and good gifts.**

**We admit that we deserve the hot wind of your judgment,  
not the healing balm of your mercy.**

*Silent confession followed by the sung response:*

*#423 Glory to God, "Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God," v. 1*

**We have come and so we ask —**

**for you to cleanse us, to correct us, to redeem us.**

**It is in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray. Amen.**

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear the truth. We may be sinful. We may pursue evil over good. We may fall into the same patterns over and over again. But God's wisdom amends our stubborn disobedience. Jesus Christ proclaims that there is great joy in heaven over any sinner who repents. Friends, believe and know that you are forgiven and redeemed.

**God brings delivery to Zion.**

**God restores the fortunes of the foolish.**

**God brings gladness to Israel!**

## Sung Response

#80 *Glory to God*, “You Shall Go Out with Joy”

## Time with Children

As the children come forward, offer them a quarter. After they have settled in, share that “we will be learning about a story from the Bible that Jesus once told. It is about a woman who lost some money and searched her entire house to find it.”

- Ask the children to hold their quarters in the palm of their right hand.
- Invite them to imagine how they would feel if they had a quarter and then lost it. Perhaps it was given to them by someone special or they earned it by doing a task.
- Then, invite them to consider what one could possibly do with a quarter. Possible answers include: buy candy/gum, put in a piggy bank, give to the church, etc.
- Ask what the group could do with all the quarters if they combined them. Possible answers: buy a snack to share, buy a toy to play with, give to those in need, treat a parent or someone else to something special.
- Describe how money provides shelter, clothing, food, water, education, and even things we simply want. Like other gifts we are given that we did not always earn, God sometimes trusts us with money. And like all gifts, to lead, to learn, to listen, to speak, to make music and millions of other gifts, God trusts us to use gifts wisely.
- Read now or near the opening of the time with children by telling the story of the woman who lost the coin from Luke 15:8–10. You may read from a pew Bible or a children’s Bible (ex. *The Spark Story Bible*, ed. Debra Thorpe Hetherington) or from the children’s book, *Who Counts?: 100 Sheep, 10 Coins, and 2 Sons* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Sasso.
- Remind the children that no one is ever lost to God, but sometimes we lose things like coins. God does not forget about people even when they are hidden to us, but sometimes we forget.
- Close by asking, I wonder how you will use the coin I have given you? Maybe you will share it or even give it away? I wonder who we can remember today by how we use our coins? Maybe it is even someone in school now to become a pastor? I wonder who God is seeing that we don’t see or is missing to us and hoping we will celebrate when we find them? I wonder how we can pay better attention to what God is seeking and looking for even now?

## Prayer for Illumination (adapted from Psalm 51)

Reveal to us this day, O God, your eternal truth. Imbue in us your joy and gladness, which transforms all of our understanding. Teach us the wisdom of your Reign, that in hearing your Word we might be transformed, that being transformed, we might participate in the renewal of your creation. **Amen.**

Litany for Theological Education Sunday

God, you rejoice in your creation,  
in our bodies, which you stitched from clay of earth,  
in our minds, which you illuminate with your Spirit.  
Yet we too often follow the wisdom of the world.  
Grant us the joy of the shepherd who finds his sheep,  
and the insight to know when our flocks have wandered.

**Lord, for your wisdom,  
which pursues what is lost, we give thanks.**

Make us grateful for the coins in our keeping,  
and eager to illumine every corner of our being  
to pursue what we have lost.

**Lord, for your wisdom,  
which enlightens our darkness, we give thanks.**

For the teachers who lead us  
from the time of our birth until we return to you,  
for the pastors who seek your Word,  
who preach the gospel of hope, even when it stings and cuts.

**Lord, for your wisdom,  
which is both comfort and affliction, we give thanks.**

For your created world which surrounds us and is entrusted to our care,  
for the ways it is marvelous and lovely, awe-inspiring and mind-blowing,  
how it teaches us the rhythms of your grace and the wideness of your mercy,  
how it calls us to follow suit, to pay attention, to notice.

**Lord, for your wisdom,  
which is found in unexpected places, we give thanks.**

Give us the capacity to study your Word and your world  
with humility, faith and wonder,  
that we may listen and respond,  
and through obedience to your will, bring change to the world.

**Lord, for your wisdom,  
which strengthens the heart, inspiring action, we give thanks.**

God you made us, and you delight in us.  
May we delight in one another  
in such a way that heaven comes to earth,  
that wisdom defeats foolishness,  
that divine knowledge redeems and restores your good creation.

**Lord, for your wisdom,  
which faithfully works in and through your creatures, we give thanks.**

Call to Offering

As the woman who searched diligently for a lost coin, as the shepherd who took off after  
one lost sheep, let us examine our hearts and our lives to bring to the surface what is  
already God's, to muster gifts that are worthy. Consider and give thanks for the blessings

of learning and knowledge you have received inside and outside of these walls as we present our tithes and offerings to the Lord and God's work in the world.

### Prayer of Dedication

Merciful and mighty God, you are the refuge of all your people. We experience this in our individual lives and in our collective life as your church. May these gifts that we have gathered offer holy refuge to those in need. May it restore the fortunes of those who are lost and down-trodden. May it bless the minds and hearts of those who seek your wisdom. May it spread your knowledge and truth throughout the world in a way that brings redemption and peace to all of creation. Trusting in your promises, we make this prayer. **Amen.**

Suggested Hymns — *Glory to God* (GTG) and 1990 *Presbyterian Hymnal* (PH)

#GTG/#PH

Opening:

#401/NA "Here in This Place"/"Gather Us In"  
#620/#478 "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"  
#12/#263 "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

Response to Sermon:

#173/NA "A Woman and a Coin"  
#746/NA "Send Me, Jesus"/*Thuma mina*  
#741/#354 "Guide My Feet"

Closing:

#742/NA "We Will Walk with God"/*Sizohamba naye*  
#722/#426 "Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak"  
#772/332 "Live into Hope"  
#79/NA "Light Dawns on a Weary World"

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