



By the waters of Babylon...

A common liturgy during a time of physical separation

April 19, 2020 – Easter 2

Call to Worship

Across time and space
Behind doors of many colors
From apartments and condos and homes and those without homes
We are called to worship the One who has created us.
Take a moment to re-orient yourself to this moment
We are God's own.
Let us worship God.

Confession

Good and gracious God, the world around us is in chaos.
Forgive us for our doubting your presence even now... in this time of global pandemic.
Help us to move beyond selfish concern,
Help us to find new ways of sharing your abundance.
Remind us of your peace.
(silent prayer)

Assurance of Pardon

Nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Nothing. Not a virus. Not even ourselves.
Friends, believe the good news of the Gospel, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Prayer for Illumination

Open our eyes that we may see and know your Word. Illumine us.



Scripture: John 20:19-31

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

The disciples are huddled behind locked doors. Why? Describe their feelings? Describe your feelings? Jesus appears to them, and his words are "Peace be with you". Does this change how they feel? Is Jesus speaking these words to you? How? Where do you see/hear/feel these words?

If you have heard this from Jesus, how do you convey the same peace to those who haven't heard or felt his presence?

If you've not felt this peace, how might you convey to those around you who have what you are feeling?

Why is it that some have felt that peace, and others have not? What might we say to each other?

An Illustration, from *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*

Sidda was chatting with a husband and wife who were asking questions about being a "woman in the theater," when she heard the unmistakable sound of her mother's voice. She closed her eyes and listened. She knew that sound: the cacophony of five jiggers of bourbon.

In front of the fireplace, center stage, Vivi was staging an elaborate promenade in which she dragged Teensy's fur on the floor behind her. Her head was thrown back in a grotesque exaggeration of a diva, and she was talking loudly in a Tallulah voice.

"They should not allow children to direct," she was saying. "They should not allow children to touch an American classic like Arthur Miller!"

Flipping the fur up and over her head and so near the fireplace the coat almost caught on fire, Vivi stared out into the crowd. She impaled Sidda with her drunken gaze. "Who gave you permission to direct a play, anyway?"

The gathering grew deathly quiet.

Sidda bit her lip. She took a step toward her mother.

"I asked you a Goddamn question, Siddalee Walker," Vivi said, her voice slurring.

Sidda felt every eye in the room on her. The space felt suddenly hot and airless. As though all life had stopped.

"Nobody gave me permission, Mama," Sidda said softly. "I was hired."

"Oh, excuse me!" Vivi said loudly. "You were hired?"

Then, gesturing wildly to the room, Vivi announced loudly, "She was hired."

Sidda could feel the tears in her eyes, but she would be damned if she would break down. Taking a deep breath, she turned to leave.

At that moment, Wade Coenen appeared with a plate of food. "You know," he said to Vivi, "I have been dying to get you alone. I have something I absolutely must tell you, and there is not one single other person in this room I could possibly reveal it to."

Caught off guard, Vivi looked at him with childlike astonishment. "What?" she asked. "What could you not possibly reveal to anyone else?" "You must follow me," Wade whispered dramatically, taking her by the arm. "This is strictly *entre nous*. And do try some of the *spanakopita*," he said as he led her out of the room. "It is positively divine."

Sidda's mouth hung open as she watched her mother follow Wade, seemingly delighted to be at his side, and seemingly oblivious of her daughter.

That night the camaraderie of her colleagues held Sidda up. The moment Vivi and Wade disappeared from the room, the actress who played Linda Loman broke spontaneously into an Irish tune she claimed she had learned from an acting teacher who once had met James Joyce.

Then Shawn Kavanaugh, the aging ex-TV star, himself a part-time lush, who'd created a haunting and somehow heroic Willy Loman, put his arm around Sidda.

"Oh, Doll," he said, "the Church is wrong. Despair is not the worst of the cardinal sins. Jealousy is. It's more complex."

Then he bowed his head to Sidda, as though he were recognizing royalty. "Terrific opening, Ms. Walker," he said. "Thank you for your keen direction. Looks like you have a fine background for drama. Just remember: keep your elbows out."

That night, Sidda walked by herself back to the old saltbox house she was sharing temporarily with Wade Coenen and the other designers. The night had grown bitterly cold.

When she got to the theater house, she found Wade Coenen sitting at the kitchen table talking on the phone. He smiled, threw her a kiss, and gestured upstairs to Sidda's bedroom. When Sidda went up, she found Vivi already asleep. She was lying in bed with her nightgown on. She had removed all her makeup, and her face was moisturized.

Sidda looked down at her sleeping mother. You always take care of your complexion, no matter what. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners.

Back downstairs, the kitchen was warm, and an old Stevie Wonder tune was playing on the radio.

"Thank you," Sidda said simply, touching Wade on the shoulder.

"Use it," Wade said.

"Right," Sidda said, thinking how many times she'd repeated the same Stanislavsky axiom to actors. Use everything in your life to create your art.

She sat down at the wooden kitchen table. She wanted to remain calm in front of her costume designer. She wanted to make a cynical joke or a Shakespearean reference. Instead, she burst into tears.

Wade Coenen poured her a glass of brandy. "Theater," he said. "Glorious theater. It creates family for all kinds of orphans."

Offering

Whether you feel the peace or doubt its presence, how might you use it to deepen your relationship with God and with others?

Prayers of the People

This week, as you pray for those whom you know, pray too for those on the frontlines of this current crisis. Pray for communities around the world as we seek to find solutions to the virus, as well as the economic fallout.

Benediction

We remain behind locked doors.

God remains with us.

May the peace that passes all of our understanding be with us. Amen.

Source material for this liturgy comes from *The Bible Workbench*, Vol 6, Issue 4 as well as Rebbeca Wells' *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (New York, HarperPerennial, 1996), pp. 180-182

This resource has been developed for the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse for use by members and friends of its congregations.