

Sample

out of the

BLUE



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Orientation

This document contains samples of the five major parts of our Advent series, *Out of the Blue*:

- 1) Preachers' Notes
- 2) Liturgical Elements
- 3) Midweek Worship Service
- 4) Weekly Devotional Resource
- 5) Advent and Christmas Pageant

This is a seven-week series that can be easily adapted to suit a four-week Advent observance as well—just hearken to the materials associated with a particular date.

The sample of the liturgical elements is from the Holy Communion portion of the liturgy. In the full liturgy, this section also includes a musical “Sanctus,” “Memorial Acclamation,” and “Amen” composed especially for this series. These musical pieces complement an Advent candle-lighting hymn, “God of Starlight and Moon.”

You’ll notice that the Midweek Service, Weekly Devotional Resource, and Pageant all work off the same idea of exploring the people in Jesus’ family tree. Each resource can stand alone, but using them in combination provides your people with multiple points of entry into the Advent season and its stories.

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Preachers' Notes Sample

NOVEMBER 6

Victoria Larson

Texts: Job 19:23-27a, Psalm 17:1-9, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17, Luke 20:27-38

“I woke up this mornin’, can’t even get out of my door,”¹ Dinah Washington sang over the sound system. My dance partner and I moved in time to the slow drumbeat, taking time to feel our way into the rhythm, centering our balance low in our bodies in a style distinctive to blues dancing.

Once upon a time, I went to the Iris Club once a month, every month, for the Indigo Blues dance. The blues music and the community that danced to it helped me feel my way out of my head—good golly, I spent so much time there—and back into my body. As I moved across the old pine boards, I felt the power of the music, each song a miniature passion of pathos, resistance, energy, and truth.

“When it rained five days and the sky turned dark as night/Then trouble's takin' place in the lowlands at night,”² sang Dinah.

Trouble’s taking place everywhere. It runs throughout today’s scripture readings too. It drives Job to the limits of his understanding of the way the world works, it spurs the Sadducees to challenge Jesus, and it dogs the possibly hypothetical woman who marries and loses not one spouse, but seven. (She would have made a great blues singer.)

Trouble lurks around what liturgist Gordon Lathrop called *little deaths*, “moments of physical sickness or disability, or the moments of letting go, of moving on, or of facing failure, all of which can be described in metaphoric language as having something of death about them.”³ Those little deaths remind us, in whispers and in shouts, that life is bounded by death and that one day everything will end.

¹ Dinah Washington, “Back Water Blues,” lyrics by Bessie Smith.

² Ibid.

³ Gordon Lathrop. *The Pastor: A Spirituality*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Blues music specializes in little deaths, and so does scripture. Look at Job, a man who has been counting off little deaths with every scrape of a potsherd for nineteen chapters by the time we get to him in today's reading. "I know that my redeemer lives!" (Job 19:25) he declares, but he's not talking about Jesus. He's speaking of his *go'el*, his nearest kinsman, who will be able to plead his case for him after he's shuffled off this mortal coil. Here, almost halfway through Job's story, the poor man's theology, worldview, and friends have all failed him, and Job is singing the blues from the ash heap.

It's both ironic and fitting that Christians usually interpret this verse from Job 19 as a proclamation about resurrection. It's right at the place where we give up, where we consign ourselves to death and our broken hopes to our survivors, that God brings new life out of death. After all, it's at the ash heap where God appears to Job out of the whirlwind. It's at the tomb where Jesus rises, rolling the weight of death away into the indigo darkness of the predawn light. It's out of the blue (and the blues) that God meets us, surprising us with what God's had in store all along: resurrection from deaths, both little and big.

Resurrection brings us to the possibly hypothetical woman of the gospel reading. Resurrection is the trouble that makes her a topic of conversation with Jesus in the first place. The Sadducees don't believe in resurrection, so they bring Jesus a logic problem in the form of a woman who had suffered the loss of seven husbands and died childless. "Whose wife will the woman be? For seven had married her," the Sadducees would like to know (Luke 20:33).

The Sadducees invite Jesus to the locus of this woman's pain to inquire how the religious system is going to work in the resurrection. Jesus' response invites them to consider how resurrection is going to rework the religious system.

He tells them that resurrection redefines this woman, whom others know by her childlessness rather than her name, as a child of God (Luke 20:36). God didn't wait for her to meet some fertility benchmark before God loved her, embraced her, and made her part of God's family. In the resurrection, the woman went from having no family to having infinite family, the family of God.

Not only that, but according to Jesus, this resurrection reality is so powerful that it has already defied the boundary of death. By reminding the Sadducees that the patriarchs—

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—are alive to God, Jesus declares that this woman, while she was living, was already a beloved child of God (Luke 20:37-38). No death, little or big, could change that.

Depending on your context, your community will either have just observed All Saints Day on October 30 or will be preparing to celebrate it this Sunday, November 6. While the lectionary provides an alternative slate of readings for the feast, there's no need to leave the readings for this twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost. Like a good blues song, they sing the reality of the small deaths in which we live. They also remind us that a redeemer shall stand upon the earth, long-awaited and still somehow out of the blue. He will appear at the cemetery of little deaths and big ones. In my imagination, he's wearing a gardener's hat and some dancing shoes, and he's in a mood to cut a rug right across the grave of our broken expectations.

In your community...

- What blues have you been singing?
- What are the little deaths confronting you?
- Where are the signs of resurrection breaking in?

Liturgical Elements Sample

HOLY COMMUNION

Holy Jesus, be our guest.
For you are already here.

God is with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts in praise.

We lift them to our God.

Let us give thanks
to the God of our salvation.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Preface

Holy God,
once you made humankind
you could do nothing but love them.

Holy Spirit,
once you called the prophets,
you gave them words to afflict
and words to heal,
and they could do nothing but speak them.

Holy Jesus,
once you committed to take the human frame,
you walked the path to the end.
You did not rush through childhood.
You never used your power for yourself.
You faced your enemies on their terms.
You taught your friends until they learned.

You allowed yourself to die

the same way you were born:
as a fragile person,
in a filthy place,
where bare flesh and blood
were spilled to give life.

This is rarely a kind world,
but you love it anyway.

This was rarely an innocent world,
but you saved it anyway.

We are rarely peaceful people,
but you have swaddled us in peace.

We will always hunger for healing.
Nurse us with grace.

Sanctus

Liturgical elements sample ends here.

SAMPLE

Midweek Worship Service Sample

From the introduction to Midweek Worship:

This resource offers a liturgical framework and content for your midweek worship service. You can use the suggested framework or incorporate the core content for each week into your congregation's favorite service of evening prayer. You can use your preferred hymns, songs, or music to anchor your worship. Each musical moment in the service includes music suggestions and general guidelines for making musical selections.

The reflections illuminate *Out of the Blue* themes from the scripture readings and connect them to saints old and new. You may read the reflections during your service or use them as starting points to do your own research. If you read them during worship, please credit the author, Victoria Larson, orally and in writing.

If your congregation is using the Weekly Devotional Resource or the Advent and Christmas Pageant from this series, you'll notice some connections to the material in this midweek service. All three resources use the same scripture texts. The Midweek Worship Service and the Weekly Devotional Resource invite people to incorporate found objects into an ever-evolving Jesse tree. Overlap appears in the weekly prompts for both resources, too. Each resource stands on its own, but using any of them in combination offers multiple entry points to explore the themes they offer.

GATHERING WORDS

Welcome in the name of the God who gathers us,
who grafts us onto the Tree of Life,
and who grows our faith daily.

Long ago, a prophet foretold
that from a stump,
a new sapling would grow.

That sapling was Jesus.

And though Jesus would stretch up to heaven,
he remembered his roots:
He called Mary and Joseph his mom and dad,
And they told him about his family tree,
from Abraham to Zechariah.

But that was only half the story.

Long ago, a savior died on the cross for us.
The dead tree of the cross put out a new shoot,
And from that shoot
a wild bush grows,
full of prickly saints and florid sinners,
all part of Jesus' family tree.
And its name is: Church.

In the tangled branches of its stories,
we learn:

**From generation to generation,
God brings new life from what was dead.
God surprises people who thought they were prepared.
God acts according to long-expected promises,
and also, somehow,
right out of the blue.**

Come, Divine Wonder:
Astonish us again.

REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK OF NOVEMBER 13

Scripture: Genesis 38:12-26

Out of the blue: A child shall lead them.

Saintly people: Tamar and Judah, Elizabeth of Hungary, Malala Yousafzai (yoo-zahf-SAI)

If the worship leader reads this reflection as written, please begin with:

This reflection comes from Barn Geese Worship's *Out of the Blue* Midweek Worship Service and was written by Victoria Larson.

"She is more in the right than I" (Genesis 38:26), says Judah of his daughter-in-law, Tamar, when he finds out just how thorough a job she's done, not just in tricking him, but in calling him to task.

If Judah and Tamar's family dynamics strike you as deeply problematic, that's because they are. We don't need our cultural sensibilities to be in tune with those of ancient Israelites to know that Judah didn't do right by his daughter-in-law. We can tell that he was supposed to protect her and provide her with security, and instead he tried to take advantage of her. The out-of-the-blue moment in this story happens to Judah: he's thunderstruck when Tamar produces his signet, cord, and staff. In that moment, God reveals to him the depth of his foolishness and irresponsibility. Tamar has tricked him into doing what he should have been doing all along: providing protection for the vulnerable person in his care.

On November 17, the church calendar remembers another young woman who confronted the established order of her day in order to protect the vulnerable. Elizabeth of Hungary was a princess, born to the royal Hungarian court in 1207. She was engaged to a Thuringian noble as a young child and moved to his court to learn the language and customs. She got married when she was just fourteen.

[Sample abridged here.]

Tamar and Elizabeth spent their lives making sure that the adults around them behaved. Both young women had a vision of what was right, and they held onto it even when the older and supposedly wiser adults told them what they were supposed to do. Their legacy lives on in young women throughout the world today, young women like Malala Yousafzai.

Born in Pakistan in 1997, Malala loved school right up until the Taliban banned her and all girls from attending. Malala spoke out publicly against the ban. When she was fifteen, a masked gunman boarded her school bus and asked, Who is Malala? He shot her in the head.

Malala awoke ten days later in an English hospital, and after months of surgery and rehabilitation, she was reunited with her family. Instead of living quietly, she decided to continue her fight for girls' education. With her father's help, she established the Malala Fund to support girls' rights to self-determination. In 2014, she won the Nobel Peace Prize, becoming the youngest-ever Nobel laureate. Now an Oxford graduate, Malala continues her advocacy for the 130 million girls still out of school today.

Isaiah tells us, "A little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). We know from the gospel of Luke that as a child, Jesus had wisdom that impressed even the much older and wiser scribes of the temple. When we need to, are we wise enough to admit that this holy child is more in the right than we are?

Group reflection prompts

Community Jesse tree prompt

Further reading

[End of Midweek Sample.]

Weekly Devotional Resource Sample

From the introduction to the Weekly Devotional Resource:

This is a weekly devotional resource. It includes entries for each of the seven weeks of an extended Advent season, plus one for Christmas. If your congregation marks a four-week Advent season, begin your devotional time early for extra reflection, or select your favorite four stories.

You may remember the take-home bags that some congregations created during the early days of the pandemic, stocked with tools for faith formation at home. With our found-object Jesse tree, we seek to recreate some of the best parts of that experience without some of the pitfalls.

Rather than using purchased items or trinkets crafted at home, you will create a Jesse tree from everyday items, or found objects, that you imbue with meaning. You'll assemble the tree over the course of the Advent season, adding to it each week, as you follow the devotional resource.

WEEK TWO: GOD'S TRICKSTERS

This week read: Genesis 38:12-26

Matthew's gospel traces Jesus' lineage through Judah and Tamar, and today's reading tells the surprising story of their relationship. Judah and Tamar are far from a perfect couple. Their relationship is built on distrust and tragedy, and Judah is responsible for most of the problems.

Judah is the son of the famous patriarch Jacob, but he's not the father's favored son. That distinction belonged to Joseph, the dreamer who annoyed the rest of his brothers. Judah was not the eldest of Jacob's children, either. That was Reuben, who decided it was better that the brothers *not* kill Joseph. Papa Jacob was a trickster and a scoundrel. Judah didn't fall far from the tree. ...[this sample section is abridged.]

...If you are searching for God's work or godly goodness in this story, consider this: once the truth comes out, Judah admits what he has done is wrong and reconciles with

Tamar. They model the complicated reconciliation that Christians should seek, even in our messiest human relationships.

Consider: When has God carried you into the story of salvation despite your behavior?

Pray: God of truth and true love, we try to hide our true selves, but you see through our disguises. You know the truth behind the lies we tell. Help us admit our imperfections to one another so we can rebuild our lives in love. Amen.

Find: Find something that you would use to help others. Examples include a bandage, a cozy blanket, a donation you'd offer at your local pantry, or a book you can share. Place it near your Jesse tree.

[End of devotional sample.]

SAMPLE

Pageant Sample

From the introduction to the pageant:

What follows is an Advent and Christmas pageant... of sorts. After all, most Christmas pageants feature more fluffy sheep than Hebrew Bible tricksters, mischief-makers, and wayward spies. Like Barn Geese Worship's *Out of the Blue* Midweek Worship Service and Weekly Devotional Resource, this pageant is grounded in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 and in Luke's story of Jesus' birth. Because it contains so many Bible stories, this pageant has the potential to be more than a pageant. It could be anything from Sunday School curriculum for the entire Advent season, to the core of an intergenerational Advent night, to an opportunity for all the ministries of your congregation to come together in one project.

This pageant is a series of six stories about some of Jesus' ancestors named in the genealogy in Matthew 1: Sarah and Abraham, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. It also includes the story of Jesus' closer relatives, Elizabeth and Zechariah, from Luke 1. As Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, they share these stories with each other along the way.

FAMILY STORY 2: TAMAR

JOSEPH.

Well, I have another family story for you! One that's a little less well-known.

NARRATOR.

In the very early days, after Abraham and Sarah had their baby Isaac, Isaac had a family, too. And one of his grandbabies was a boy named Judah.

Back then God had told everyone that they should care for people and love one another.

Judah was the oldest son.

He should have known that.

But Judah was not always kind to his family.

His youngest brother was named Joseph. He was kind of annoying.

JOSEPH.

I'm better than all of you brothers. And I'm Dad's favorite!

NARRATOR.

His brothers wanted to get rid of Joseph. Judah should have stopped them. But he went along with the plan.

JUDAH.

Let's sell Joseph for money. Then people will take him far away and we will never have to worry about him again.

NARRATOR.

They threw Joseph in a pit and sold him for money.

JOSEPH.

Whyyyyyy!

NARRATOR.

Most of us would feel bad if we did this to our brother. But Judah just liked to get his way.

When Judah got older, he had kids of his own. The kids grew up. And one of them died.

That man had a wife named Tamar.

TAMAR.

I am so sad! My husband has died. Now what will I do?

NARRATOR.

Judah should have taken care of her. But he tried to cheat her instead.

JUDAH.

Who cares about her? I have other things to worry about.

TAMAR.

Do you think about anyone but yourself?

NARRATOR.

So Tamar came up with a plan. If Judah cheated her, she would cheat Judah.

She knew that Judah liked to sneak off to go to someplace he should never go.

TAMAR.

If I disguise myself and run fast, I can get there before him!

NARRATOR.

When Judah arrived in the place that was off-limits, he found Tamar waiting for him. But he didn't know it was her.

JUDAH.

I'm looking for trouble.

TAMAR.

I'm trouble.

NARRATOR.

While they were there, Tamar took something that Judah had. She talked him into giving it to her as a gift.

TAMAR.

I like that special cord you have. Can I borrow it for a while?

JUDAH.

Okay, but only for a bit. This is mine and nobody else has anything like it. Please don't break it.

NARRATOR.

Later, some people figured out that Tamar had gone to that place where nobody should go. They ran to Judah to tattle on her.

PEOPLE.

Hey, Boss! Tamar's in trouble!

JUDAH.

Let's kill her.

NARRATOR.

When they told Tamar she was in trouble, she gave them the special cord that belonged to Judah.

TAMAR.

Show him this special cord. Then see what he says.

PEOPLE.

Hey, Boss! Tamar said she found this when she got in trouble. Isn't this yours?

JUDAH.

Uh oh.

NARRATOR.

Tamar had showed Judah that he had to care for people. She showed him that cheating people was wrong.

From that moment, Judah knew he had to take better care of his family. Later, when Tamar had a baby, Judah knew he had to take care of that baby, too. Tamar named that baby Perez.

[End of pageant sample.]