

## **Dramatic Scriptural Call to Worship: “Did You Forget Who You Are?”**

Ash Wednesday: March 1, 2017

By: Dr. Jenny Whitcher

*The following combined scripture reading and call to worship was written by Dr. Jenny Whitcher, as an invited guest preacher and worship leader to the Iliff School of Theology Chapel in Denver, CO. This dramatic scriptural call to worship was performed by Master of Arts in Social Justice and Ethics (MASJE) student Brydie Harris as “the Prophet,” and Caran Ware Joseph, Iliff’s Donor and Alumni Relations Director, as “God.”*

*Adapted from: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Isaiah 58:1-12; and 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10.*

**God:** Raise the alarm on my holy mountain, amongst these sacred people!

**Prophet:** Let everyone tremble in fear because the day of the Lord is upon us.

It is a day of frostiness and gloom, a day of thick clouds and white ether.

Suddenly, like a snow storm rolling east across the Rocky Mountains,  
a great and mighty force appears.

Nothing like it has been seen before, or has it?

Nothing like it will ever be seen again, or will it?

Fire burns in front of them, and flames follow after them.

Ahead of them the land lies beautiful in its diversity.

Behind them is nothing but desolation and destruction; not one being escapes.

They swell forward like weaponized drones.

Look at them as they swoop across the mountaintops.

Listen to the noise they make—a low-grade, ceaseless,  
buzzing that amplifies as it draws near.

Like the roar of 24-hour news and social media threads filled with hate  
sanctioned by alternative facts.

Fear grips all the people; every face grows ashen and pale with terror.

They spring forward, embedded within our white house, capitol buildings,  
businesses, schools, nonprofit organizations, congregations, families...  
and ourselves.

They break through institutional walls, democratic oaths, and faith covenants like  
a camouflaged hunter.

They’ve sat silent, festering, and emerge from hiding to teach us our truths.

Straight into our face they march,

Straight into our hearts.

Never breaking rank.

They break through our defenses, our fact-based academic jargon, and our  
theology, without missing a step.

They swarm over the city, run along its walls, preparing to build their own.

They enter all the houses, apartments, shelters, and blanketed underpasses,  
climbing like thieves through the windows and back doors, wrenching  
blankets from cold fingers.

The earth quakes as they advance, the heavens tremble, and the ozone gapes,  
ripped in half like the temple veil.

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The sun and moon grow frost over, and the stars no longer shine.  
The bitter blizzard makes the world glow dull in a fog.  
The Lord is at the head and leads them with a shout.  
They follow orders without critical doubt.  
The day of the Lord is an awesome, terrible thing.  
Who can possibly survive?  
They forgot who you are.

**God whispers:** Did *you* forget who you are?

**People:** It’s a “Come to Jesus” nightmare, and we are called to rise.

**God:** Turn to me now, while there is time.

Give me your hearts.  
Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.  
Don’t tear your clothing in your grief,  
But rather, tear your hearts instead.  
I am merciful and compassionate,  
slow to get angry at you,  
and filled with unfailing love for you.  
I am eager to forgive and not punish you.

**Prophet:** Who knows? Perhaps God will give you a reprieve,

Send you a blessing instead of this curse...  
Perhaps you will be able to offer praise and thanksgiving to the Lord your God as  
before...

**People:** Not just pleading prayers for God to save us from ourselves.

Did we forget who we are?

**God:** Sound the alarm!

Announce a time for clarity  
Call the people together for a solemn meeting.  
Gather *all* the people—the elders, mid-lifers, young adults, youth, and especially  
the babies.  
Call them away from their their dusty pews, classrooms, and ivory towers.  
Let those who minister in the Lord’s presence, stand and weep in the narthex as  
the people walk by the entrances of dying churches.  
Let them pray:

**People:** Spare your people, Lord!

Don’t let your children become objects of mockery.  
Don’t let us become a joke to those who say: ‘Where is your God now?’  
Even when we are the ones whose lips tremble: ‘Where are you now God?’

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**God:** Raise the alarm!

Deacon, heave the church bells!

Shout! Don't be timid.

Tell the people of their injustices, while they claim they are devout.

They come to the church and seem delighted to learn all about God.

They warm pews, smiling, nodding, and even singing along,

But they don't live their sacred text.

They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of God.

They ask me to take action on their behalf,

Pleading their selfish interests,

Seeking injustice and hatred in my name,

Pretending they want to be close to me.

*Did you forget whose you are?*

**People:** We've prayed on Sunday morning, during finals week, and always at football games.

Why aren't you impressed?

We've tithed from what's left after taxes, a new car, and the latest gadgets.

Why aren't you impressed?

We've changed our thumb's up facebook likes to hearts, so that people know we really care.

Why aren't you impressed?

We've had trouble sleeping, and are numb with despair.

We've been very hard on ourselves, and you don't seem to care!

Did you forget who we are?

**God:** I will tell you why!

It's because you are praying to please yourselves.

Even while you meditate and pray, you keep oppressing the employee;

student; colleague; congregant; immigrant, refugee, American

Indian, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, person of

color, woman, child, elder, poor, differently abled neighbor...the list goes on.

What good is meditation and prayer when you keep spreading hate?

This kind of prayer will never get you anywhere with me.

You humble yourselves by going through the motions of forgiveness,

Bowing your heads like grass blowing in the wind,

Hoping no one will notice when you trespass again.

You dress in simple clothes and cover yourselves with ashes:

“Well at least I am not like them. Those who dress in riches and over-cleanse inside and out.”

Is this what you call prayer and fasting?

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Do you really think this will please me?

No.

What I want is for you to:

Free those who are wrongly and unfairly imprisoned and detained:

The immigrant; the refugee; the black; the Latinx and Xhicano; the American Indian; the activist; those with mental, emotional, and physical differences...the children.

Lighten the burden of those you are responsible to and for:

The employee, the student, the neighbor...the pastor.

Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind and bury.

Share your food with the hungry, your clean water with the thirsty.

Don't build that pipeline, frack the earth, leech and leak all over mother earth.

Give shelter to the homeless, safety and power to the threatened and vulnerable.

Give so that none suffer.

Do not hide from relatives, neighbors, colleagues, and friends who need your help.

Even and especially when it is too much to bear.

For then.

*Then* your salvation will come like the new dawn,  
and your wounds will quickly heal.

Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you  
from behind, above, below, and ahead.

At just the right time, I heard you.

On the day of salvation, I helped you.

Did you forget who I am?

**Prophet:** Indeed, the “right time” is now.

Today is the day of salvation.

**People:** We must live in such a way that no one will stumble and fall because of us,

And no one could possibly find fault with our ministry.

In everything we do, we must show that we are true ministers of God.

We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind.

We have been beaten, arrested, faced angry mobs and politicians, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, gone without food, and broken our bodies.

We prove ourselves by our purity and authenticity, our understanding and patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and above all by our sincere love.

We faithfully preach the truth to power.

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God’s power is working in and through us.

We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack, and the left hand for defense.

We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us.

We are honest, but they call us impostors, paid protestors, Social Justice Warriors, Nasty Women, *those* people from Black Lives Matter, illegals, environmentalist wackos, politically correct.

We are ignored, even though we are well known as the majority.

We live close to death, but we are still alive.

We have been beaten, but we have not been killed.

Our hearts ache, but we always find joy.

We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others.

We own nothing, and yet we have everything.

*Quisieron enterrarnos, pero se les olvido que somos semillas.*

They wanted to bury us,

But they forgot that we are seeds.

Did *they* forget who *we* are?