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Poet-in-Residence**

Confirmation Promises (2012)

Good News for God's children (2016)

Holy Binding (2012)

Restoring Sabbath (2012)

The Power of Forgiveness (2012)

Confirmation Promises

With hearts prepared and minds resolved,
we come before You, Lord, to pledge our
lives to You. There is one body and one Spirit,
and our hope rests in binding ourselves to You.
Today we make our lifelong promises in Your name.
In all humility we ask to be received into the
communion of all the faithful, that long unbroken
chain of believers stretching back century upon century.
To those who preceded us we pay homage,
praising them for their example of devotion.
Today we make our lifelong promises in Your name.
Lord, we come before You with prepared hearts
and resolved minds, but You know well how we
are prone to stray from Your appointed path.
Are we not sometimes like hapless sheep
who wander from their shepherd?
It is through Your grace alone that we
will keep the promises we make today.
Strengthen us, we humbly pray, and send
Your Holy Spirit to sustain us when our hearts
are fearful, our minds lack fortitude
and our footsteps falter.
Today we make our lifelong promises in Your name.

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Good News for God's children

Lord God, You have called us to be Your beloved children. You have taught us that in Your gentle, constant embrace we are never unloved. Is that always true? Never, ever unloved? God responds: Never, ever. You are always My beloved. But Lord, sometimes we don't love ourselves. We fall far short of what we long to be in Your service. You gave us the law and we broke it. The best among us have fallen into sin. God responds: When you sin, My grace abounds all the more. But, Lord, why did You give us the law if we can't keep it? We feel inadequate, failures in need of spiritual scouring. God responds: Don't you know, beloved, that I gave you the law to show you how much you need the Gospel? But, Lord, we are wholly unworthy of Your gift of salvation; we do not deserve Jesus' sacrifice. Doesn't that matter? God responds: It doesn't matter, beloved; what matters is that I will always, always cherish you and claim you as Mine. We really want to please You, and we try to earn Your love, Lord; we need to try harder, work more, be better Christians. God responds: Don't you know, beloved, that you cannot earn My love? I give it to you as a free gift. Just claim it. But Lord, we want to do better, and so often we fail. What we try to do fizzles or backfires. A broken relationship cannot be mended; our tools of communication rust out. Our earnest prayers for healing are of no avail and our loved one worsens. A job conflict escalates toward a simmering crisis that is bound to erupt. Why does it all seem so out of control? God responds: You cannot control what happens, beloved; please turn that control over to Me and trust Me. But Lord, sometimes we do the unforgivable. We did not mean to, but it happened. We commit arrow-sharp, cutting words or actions. The damage has been done. There is no retrieval, no repair. How can You love us when we do something so sinful? God responds: I will always, always, forgive and love you. Nothing you could ever do is beyond My forgiveness. Not even Calvary.

Holy Binding

Diminutive gowns and suits of white,
tissued safely in storage by generational hands.
Gowns and suits of white cared for by mothers
whose infants wore them, grew, and whose own
babies wore them. The newborns do not know
this, but some of these tiny waving hands may
one day tissue-store their baptismal garb away
for those who follow. We who gather know it.
We who gather here to witness this solemn binding
know something else: we play no passive part today.
Will these white-clad newborns really renounce all that
threatens to separate them from the love of Christ?
They will, with our help.
Will they really put their whole trust in His grace?
They will, with our help.
Just as these infants are bound to Christ, so we
are bound to them in Him. They will know snares,
they will know trials. Paths to temptation will
open before them. We would prevent these ills
and evils if we could, but we cannot return to
the sanctuary of that first garden; nor can they.
We pray for you, small sons and daughters of Eve,
that as you grow you may learn to love and serve
others in the power of the sustaining Spirit.
Let this holy oil seal you in our community
of believers. Oil of royal priesthood,
oil of royal servanthood. Let this holy water
mark you as Christ's own forever. Water of life,
water of resurrection. We welcome you,
little children of God; may He ever
guide you with His fatherly care.
Will we who this day witness your
holy binding always help you to
seek and serve Christ in all peoples?
We will, with God's help.
Will we who this day stand as one body
always help you to strive for justice and peace?
We will, with God's help.
Most of all, little white-clad ones, with God's help
we will always hold out our hands to you in love.

Restoring Sabbath

Lord, whatever happened to Your Sabbath?
Is not this the day You appointed
a day of rest? So much work had You
accomplished in just six days: creating
the firmament and the day and night sky:
labor to last for all eternity. Out of the
formless void You fashioned a whole
world, from tiniest ant to largest leviathan.
Then You finished by forming us in
Your image. After that intense six-day
burst of divine energy You ceased,
and rested on the seventh day.
What is so important, Lord, that we
cannot keep Your Sabbath?
What foolish mortals we must be
to think our work more urgent
than Yours. If even You rested on
the seventh day, why should we do less?
Really, Lord, how momentous is making
a trip to the supermarket compared
to gathering the vast waters into seas?
How consequential is mowing the grass
compared to calling into being all the
shrubs and herbs and flowering trees?
What is so important, Lord, that we
cannot keep Your Sabbath?
Where is it decreed that football
and soccer tournaments must
take place on Sunday? Where is it
written that we must clean out the
garage and wash the dog on Sunday?
If even You felt the need for rest,
what hubris leads us to believe
we can do without? Please, Lord,
help us to put the rest back in Sabbath.

The Power of Forgiveness

*(Inspired by the reconciliation ministry of
Pastor Deo Gashagaza in Rwanda)*

Two hands stretch out;
they reach across years of pain.
They touch fingertips, tentatively.
There is a choice here; the pain is
the great divide. It has been nurtured;
it has taken on power of its own.
This power can continue to grow, or...
I forgive you; please forgive me.
Two hands stretch out; they clasp.
There is warmth here; there is hope here.
There are possibilities here.
The two hands are stronger than one hand.
I forgive you; please forgive me.
The two clasped hands reach past the pain,
past the remembrance of what caused
the pain, past the need to remember the pain.
This is not forgetting; this is forgiving.
There is a difference.
The two clasped hands form a bond;
the bond is a beginning.
I forgive you; please forgive me.
This is not yet love, but it could be.
This is a kind of acceptance.
This is a kind of hope.
Two hands stretch out; they clasp.
Their power is stronger than
the power of pain, however long
that pain was nurtured and tended.
Two hands stretch out; when they clasp
they form a bond. The bond is a beginning;
now the path to love can begin.
I forgive you; please forgive me.