



## **Liturgy for International AIDS Candlelight Memorial Service**

**18 May 2025**

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**Based on Revelation 21:1-6, Acts 11:1-18, Psalm 148, and John 13:31-35**

*(Setting: A sacred space, perhaps with a central table holding candles. Music is playing softly. The atmosphere is one of reverence, remembrance, and hope.)*

### **1. Call to Worship:**

**Leader:** Today we gather in this sacred space, joining with communities around the world, to remember those we have loved and lost to HIV and AIDS. We stand in solidarity with those of us who live with HIV, and we renew our commitment to a world where this disease no longer brings suffering and death.

**People:** We come seeking comfort, strength, and guidance. We come to listen to the word of God, to offer our prayers, and to be challenged to love one another as Christ loved us.

### **2. Opening Prayer:**

(All In unison)

God of love and compassion, we come before you with heavy hearts, mindful of the pain and loss that HIV AND AIDS has brought into our world. We thank you for the lives of those who have gone before us. We pray for your comfort and healing for those who stayed behind as well as those of us who live with HIV today. Open our hearts to your Spirit, that we may be instruments of your peace and justice. Amen.

### **3. Music/Song: How Great Thou Art**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VffdBR4kDM0>)

#### **4. Reading 1: Psalm 148 Condensed and Paraphrased**

(A call to all creation to praise God, reminding us of the interconnectedness of all life.)

*Praise the Lord, all creation! Everything in the heavens, from the highest realms to the sun, moon, and stars, praise Him. Everything on earth, from the seas and weather to the mountains, plants, and animals, praise Him. All people, young and old, rulers and ruled, praise the Lord! For His name is supreme; His glory fills heaven and earth. He strengthens His people and honours His faithful, Israel, who are close to Him. Praise the Lord!*

#### **5. Moment of Penitence and Intercession:**

**Leader:** Before we continue, let us take a moment to acknowledge our own shortcomings in responding to the AIDS epidemic. Let us confess our silence, our fear, and our complicity in systems that perpetuate stigma and discrimination.

*(Silence is observed for a period of reflection.)*

**Leader:** God of mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For times when we have turned away from those affected by HIV and AIDS,

People: Forgive us, O God.

**Leader:** For our failure to speak out against injustice and inequality,

People: Forgive us, O God.

**Leader:** For the stigma and discrimination we have allowed to persist,

People: Forgive us, O God.

**Leader:** For our complacency in the face of suffering,

People: Forgive us, O God.

**Leader:** Grant us the courage to change, to speak the truth, and to act with love and compassion.

People: Guide us, O God.

## 6. Reading 2:

### **Acts 11:1-18 (Modern and everyday language paraphrase):**

(The story of Peter's vision and encounter with Cornelius, highlighting the breaking down of barriers and the inclusivity of God's love.)

*The news got around Judea that non-Jewish people had also accepted God's message. So, when Peter came back to Jerusalem, some of the Jewish believers gave him a hard time for spending time and eating with uncircumcised people.*

*Peter explained what happened: "I was in Joppa, praying, when I had a vision. I saw this huge sheet coming down from heaven, filled with all kinds of animals. A voice told me to kill and eat them, but I was like, 'No, God! I've never eaten anything like that in my life.' But the voice said, 'Don't call something unclean if I've made it clean.'*

*Then, some people showed up from Cornelius's place, and the Spirit told me to go with them. When I got there, and started talking, the Holy Spirit came down on those non-Jewish people, just like He did on us at the beginning. That reminded me of Jesus saying, 'John baptized with water, but you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'*

*So, if God gave them the same gift He gave us when we believed in Jesus, how could I possibly stand in His way?"*

*When the others heard this, they calmed down and praised God, saying, "So, God has let non-Jewish people turn to Him and receive eternal life too!"*

### **Homily on Acts 11:1-18:**

This passage reveals the transformative power of God's love to break down the walls that divide us. Just as Peter came to understand that God's salvation is for all people, regardless of their background, so too are we called to embrace all who are affected by HIV AND AIDS. We must reject the stigma and discrimination that create barriers and prevent people from accessing the care and support they need. The church is called to lead the way in demonstrating a love that transcends prejudice and fear.

## 7. Declaration of Faith (based on the Belhar Confession):

**Leader: Let us declare our faith as we stand together:**

**People:** We believe in the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- We believe that God has revealed himself as the One who wants to bring about justice and true peace among people;

- We believe that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that God calls the church to follow him in this;
- We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker; that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.
- We believe that in obedience to Jesus Christ its head, the church is called to confess and to act.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine and practice that denies the unity of humankind and the reconciliation in Christ, that denies that God is in a special way the God of the poor, the destitute and the wronged, and that denies that the church is called to follow Jesus Christ in this.

#### **8. Reading 3: John 13:31-35 (NIV):**

(Jesus's commandment to love one another, a call to radical love and service.)

*31 When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.*

*33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.*

*34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

#### **Homily on John 13:31-35:**

Jesus's commandment to love one another is not merely a sentimental plea; it is a call to radical action. He calls us to love as he loved, with a love that is selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional. In the context of HIV and AIDS, this means standing in solidarity with those who are marginalized, advocating for justice, and working to create communities where all are welcomed and valued. Our love for one another is the most powerful witness we can offer to the world.

#### **9. Litany of Remembrance and Hope:**

**Leader: For those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses...**

People: We remember them with love and gratitude.

**Leader: For those of us who are living with HIV...**

People: We offer our support and solidarity.

**Leader: "We remember the dedication of those researchers and caregivers striving to find a cure and provide care and acknowledge the impact that the withdrawal of USAID funding has had on their vital work."**

People: We give thanks for their dedication and compassion. We prayed for sufficient funding for the continuation of this research

**Leader: For those who are marginalized and stigmatized because of HIV and AIDS...**

People: We commit ourselves to breaking down barriers and promoting justice, especially in terms of access to quality care

**Leader: For a world where HIV and AIDS no longer claims lives or diminishes human potential...**

People: We pray and work for the fulfilment of this vision.

*(Candles are lit during the litany, symbolizing remembrance, hope, and the light of Christ.)*

#### **10. Reading 4: Revelation 21:1-6 (KJV):**

(A vision of a new heaven and a new earth, where suffering and death are no more, offering hope for the future.)

*1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*

### **Homily on Revelation 21:1-6:**

This passage offers a vision of hope, a promise that one day, God will wipe away every tear, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. This vision sustains us in the midst of our present struggles, reminding us that God is working to bring about a new reality where all suffering will be overcome. As we work to end the HIV and AIDS epidemic, we are participating in God's work of healing and restoration. We are called to be bearers of this hope, offering comfort and encouragement to those who are affected by this disease.

### **11. The Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

### **12. Call to Action:**

**Leader:**

**We have been called to love one another as Christ loved us. We have been reminded of God's promise to be with us always, even amid our suffering. We have been given a vision of hope, a world where all tears will be wiped away. Therefore, let us go forth from this service with a renewed commitment to:**

- **Remember those who have died and honour their memory.**
- **Stand in solidarity with those who are living with HIV.**
- **Educate ourselves and others about HIV prevention, treatment, and care.**
- **Challenge stigma and discrimination wherever we encounter them.**
- **Advocate for policies and programs that promote justice and health equity.**
- **Be the light of Christ in a world that needs healing.**

**People:** We are all created in the image of God and called to reflect His love and glory.

We celebrate the diversity of humankind and affirm the beauty and worth of every individual. Those living with HIV AND AIDS are our brothers and sisters, deserving

of compassion, respect, and justice. We continue to stand in solidarity with them and commit ourselves to fighting stigma and discrimination. We remember those who have died and honour their memory by working for a world where all are valued and cared for. We hold fast to the hope of a future without AIDS, where all may experience fullness of life.

13. Music/Song: The Church's One Foundation  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3GzJIXa2fQ>)

**14. Benediction:**

**Go forth, with love as your guide, remembering the new commandment:**

**Love one another as Christ loved you.**

**Declare His praises and let all creation worship God's holy name.**

**Embrace all people, all are welcome in His house.**

**And go with the promise, He will wipe every tear from our eyes.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**the love of God,**

**and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**

**be with you now and forevermore. Amen.**

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