

# Readings for Child Safety Sunday

## compiled by Salford Mennonite Church

### Call to Worship Lent 5

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Leader: Come. Bring your weary bones and your crushed souls.

*All: Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Come. Bring your dashed hopes and broken dreams.

*All: Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Come. Bring your heavy sorrow and lingering sadness.

*All: Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Bring all that you have and all that you are.

The Spirit is here to breathe life into all that is lifeless.

### Prayer for Our Children

Written by David Orr, *Dove's Nest resources for Child Abuse Prevention Month 2017*.

<http://dovesnest.net/sites/default/files/Bulletin%20Insert%202017.pdf> accessed March 2, 2017.

Leader: Creator God, we pause to raise a prayer of thanksgiving for our children.

*People: You have entrusted the miracle of life to us.*

Leader: Open our eyes to see your image in them.

*People: Open our ears to hear the needs of their hearts.*

Leader: We renew our commitment to our children.

*People: We dedicate ourselves to their care, nurture, and protection.*

Leader: As you show love, patience, and compassion to us,

*People: Give us love, patience, and compassion for them.*

Leader: Help us by your Holy Spirit, Loving God.

*All: Amen.*

### Words of Confession

Written by Joseph Hackman March 2017

Worship Leader:

We confess that too often we have forgotten the little ones,

We fail to pay attention, or notice their vulnerability,

Our daughters, our sons, too many have suffered, harmed by the evils of abuse.

*Forgive us, O God, when we failed to pay attention (silent confession)*

Pastors:

We confess that church leaders too often have failed to protect our children,

We've cared more about keeping the peace in the community than pursuing justice,

We've cared more to protect the powerful than the vulnerable,

Our daughters, our sons, too many have suffered, harmed by the evils of abuse.

*Forgive us, O God, when we failed to protect (silent confession)*

Congregation:

We confess as the body of Christ we have not always been a source of safety and healing,

We've said through our silence, move on with your life, leave those things in the past,

We've said through our silence, you've made up your story,

We've said through our silence, your pain is yours alone, and is not to be shared among the body of Christ.

*Forgive us, O God, when we've failed to listen and validate (silent confession)*

## **Voices of Lament**

*These words were written in March 2017 by members of Salford Mennonite Church who are survivors of child abuse. They were compiled from reflections on abuse and healing in reference to the Ezekiel 37 passage. The survivors have agreed to make their words available to other congregations for use in worship.*

While some days have overflowed with excitement and anticipation of the possibilities of being fully restored, most days can be described as “wading through a never-ending lake of molasses”. Healing and restoration involve hard, lonely work.

I think it is easy to fall prey to the voices that were planted during the abuse – voices that say, “don’t tell, nobody will believe you, nobody loves you, nobody cares... useless, ugly, worthless, fat,” and so much more.

Healing has involved facing many devastating truths that have been hidden deep inside for decades. One of the hardest is how can a person who loves you, takes care of you, plays with you, who you adore - be the same person who scares, hurts, confuses and destroys you?

The sexual abuse resulted in a 5-year-old girl feeling responsible to keep herself and her sibling safe from further harm- that if I were extra good and helpful and perfect, bad things wouldn’t happen because the only way my mind could make sense out of being hurt, scared, full of shame, and feeling disgusting was to believe it was my fault because my dad was good and loving so I must have done something wrong to deserve it: I was a bad girl.

As an adult looking back on my childhood church, I have the perspective that my home church kept their distance from our family, almost not wanting to find out what was going on in our lives. We stayed on the periphery. We, of course, suffered silently, following an unwritten rule to NOT tell anyone about the abuse going on in the home. I learned the quote, “Don’t air your dirty laundry in public”, before I understood what it meant.

As an adult, I feel that some churches tend to judge harshly those who suffer from the effects of earlier abuse, calling depression, anxiety, or addictions “spiritual matters”. Some people in the church reason that IF you pray hard enough, God will heal you.

To this day I still wrestle with feelings of guilt that I didn’t have more inner strength to report what happened because I know now, for certain, this particular individual did similar things to other young women.

When life gets really tough, the old scars become current wounds and contribute to an even more empty, helpless, and painful existence.

Some days the memories still knock the wind out of me.

**Pastor/worship leader: As church leaders we hear you and we believe you. We grieve the pain and loss you have had to bear.**

**Congregation: As your church community we hear you and believe you. We grieve with you. We scarcely know how to respond.**

## **Voices of Hope**

*These words were written in March 2017 by members of Salford Mennonite Church who are survivors of child abuse. They were compiled from reflections on abuse and healing in reference to the Ezekiel 37 passage. The survivors have agreed to make their words available to other congregations for use in worship.*

Paradoxically, I have needed the care and support of my brothers and sisters in the body of Christ on this journey of redemption. Some of you here at Salford have helped me on my road to healing and, in so doing, have become vessels of the hope that God shows us in Christ.

We don't need to go around telling everyone how bad things were. We DO need to be able to tell our stories to ourselves as we remember them. I have started to write my truth on paper.

I know that if I need help, there is a network of people who will love me and quiet those "voices" that so eagerly creep into my head. I know there are people who care more about me than I ever realized. Words of affirmation, hugs, texts, and prayers are offered freely without hidden agendas.

The only explanation I have is that God loves the broken. He sends his love through others who are broken and somehow we become more whole in the process. It's crazy to think, that my brokenness can help someone else and your brokenness can help me. The more open and honest I am about my messy bits, the more I am shocked to learn that others have the same messy bits. Why don't we tell each other these things sooner? I've been hiding these awful life experiences for fear of losing everyone in my life. What I've discovered is that by sharing my truth, it gives me peace. Others share their truth and it gives them peace. Creating a safe place to share is imperative to healing. We all have stuff ... why does it have to be a secret?

I feel that God's Spirit has moved in me to continue to thrive and to help others on their pathway toward healing and telling their stories.

As broken people – sinners and sinned against – we were hopeless. BUT the narrative in Ezekiel shows us that God brings life back from the dead. The story in Ezekiel points to the resurrection – flesh from bone, beauty from ashes, life from death. This is my story and it is our story here at Salford as well.

**Pastor/worship leader: As church leaders we hear you and we believe you. We long for restoration.**

**Congregation: As your church community we hear you and believe you. We long for restoration.**