



# **Access Sunday Resources**

**October 8, 2023**

## **What Is Access Sunday?**

(For use in bulletins or other promotion material)

Access Sunday is an annual celebration of the gifts persons with disabilities bring to church community, and the joys of being in accessible community. It is also a time to remember and repent of the harm done to disabled people in religious spaces, and to call upon the whole church to recommit itself to access as a justice issue. In the UCC calendar, the second Sunday in October is designated as Access Sunday, but any Sunday of the year is a good time to consider disability and accessibility. Approximately 1 in 4 people in the United States live with some form of disability, and almost everyone else will develop one at some point in their life. As such, disability and accessibility are vitally important topics for us all, and for the church.

This Access Sunday, let us honor and celebrate disability wisdom, creativity, and brilliance. Let us expand our

notions of God and theology. And let us call one another into greater access for all.

## **Call to Worship**

by Stephanie Niemela

Pastor: Accessible, inclusive, multi-sensory God, in celebration of You and Your Creation today, we give thanks for all.

**All: We give thanks for people of all experiences, disabilities, and abilities.**

Pastor: God, you invite us to learn more, to connect more, to offer helpful accommodations; so people of all abilities and disabilities, minds and bodies, can thrive.

**All: God, all minds and bodies echo Your reflection.**

Pastor: God, You are accessible to all. Opening our awareness to You on this Access Sunday, together may Your Creation be joyful and reflective. There is work to celebrate and work to continue in making Your world fully accessible.

**All: Amen.**

## **Opening Prayer**

by Stephanie Niemela

([Video version available](#))

God of all of our senses and all abilities and disabilities, we come before you, preparing our bodies, hearts, and minds for worship. Whether having a singular or multiple focus; whether comfortable, uncomfortable, or somewhere in between; feeling included, discluded, or somewhere in between: we are celebrating the ways that our minds and bodies experience the world, and reflect and echo your love, truth, and grace. God, we thank you for diversity in abilities, which we celebrate today. Amen.

## **Confession**

by Kim Williams

All: Holy God, we confess that we have not always been inclusive, even though we try to be. That when we have observed difference we have failed to marvel at the way that each person we meet is created-in-your-image. We admit that we have much to learn when it comes to loving our neighbor as we love you and as we love ourselves. We are even skirting around the use of the word disability as we say this prayer, because as we

move toward full inclusion it requires us to unlearn biases, including which words we *should*\* use, and this is uncomfortable work, God. Help us to value one another's humanity over our own discomfort over and over and over again. Amen.

*\*Disabled is preferred by the disabilities community over euphemisms that center ability such as "differently abled" or "handicapped." This varies from person to person because no disability is a monolith, but in general it is a best practice to use "disabled."*

## **Assurance of Pardon**

by Kim Williams

Leader: God is with us in every unlearning. God is guiding us through every slip of the tongue, every oops, I shouldn't use that term, in every moment when we catch ourselves in the middle of an outdated way of being, and the Holy Spirit gently nudges us toward the loving Kin-dom that Christ calls us to co-create here on earth. May the Spirit of grace-in-the-awkwardness continue to forgive and bless our journey to full inclusion of all of God's beloveds. Amen!

## **Invitation to Offering**

by Gayle McGlaulin

With God's love, there are no competitions, no shortcomings, no deficits, and no shortages. In God's house, there is an abundance of love and grace that endures forever. There is a full and meaningful life for each of us. And because of that, we rejoice in our hearts as we now share our tithes and our offerings, recognizing that never-ending source of love and grace that extends to each of us.

## **Prayer of Dedication**

by Gayle McGlaulin

Holy one, You are the source of all that we are and all that we have. While You are more desired than gold, and sweeter than honey, we bring You these gifts that they may be used to revive the souls and meet the needs of those in this faith community and in the wider world. Bless these gifts and this community of faith that we may be instruments of Your peace and ambassadors of Your love so that all those we meet may know that You are accessible to them and present for them. Amen.

## **Benediction**

by Stephanie Niemela

[\(Video version available\)](#)

God of all of our senses,

God who created and celebrates all of our abilities and disabilities, visible or invisible:

God, we are known and loved by you.

And as we go from this space into your creation,

bringing with us the message and the celebration of your inclusion,

may we feel and experience that in all minds and bodies.

Go in peace, knowing that you are held, loved, and known by the still-speaking eternal God.

Thanks be to God, amen.

## **Bodies: Divine, Human, Blessed**

A liturgy

by Bekah Maren Anderson

[This liturgy may be used at various points in a service. It may be adjusted or abridged as a call to worship, a pastoral or collective prayer, a benediction, or a standalone ritual of blessing. Spoken parts may be read by a single voice, split between leader and congregation, or

shared among multiple leaders. Use and adapt as best fits your setting.]

God, you know the blessings and burdens of bodies.

Your embodiment is beyond human, yet knows what it is to be human.

You sat beneath a tree with Abraham and Sarah.

You burned as a bush, and covered mountains as a cloud.

You walked in the silence before Elijah.

You appeared as wheels and creatures to Ezekiel.

And when you chose to be human, you cried and nursed as an infant.

You walked in the wilderness and the cities.

Your feet were covered in dust and grime, and were washed, as you washed the feet of your friends.

You reached out to those in need with gentle hands, callused from carpentry.

You grew hungry, and thirsty, and weary.

You died in a body, and rose in a body, and the proof of your life were the wounds in your flesh and the breaking of the bread that is you.

We praise you and your many bodies, O God. And we know that you have blessed our bodies, and all bodies.

Bodies that are black, brown, white, and all races;  
bodies that are trans, nonbinary, male, female, and all  
genders and gender expressions;  
bodies that visibly disabled, invisibly disabled,  
neurodivergent, Mad, nondisabled, of all abilities and  
disabilities, all modes of thinking and knowing and feeling;  
bodies that are queer, gay, straight, bisexual, asexual,  
aromantic, polyamorous, of all sexualities and relationship  
orientations;  
bodies that are fat, thin, curvy, muscled, large, and small,  
all sizes and shapes.

No body is strange to you, who have been a pillar of flame.  
All bodies are beautiful to you, who made humanity in your  
image and called us good.

All bodies are cared for by you, who provided meat and  
manna in the wilderness, feasts from loaves and fishes, and  
splendid clothes even for the lilies.

Bless our bodies,  
for through them we know you.

Bless our bodies,  
for in them we do your work.

Bless our bodies,  
for with them we experience suffering, and need your  
care.

Bless our bodies,  
for with them we experience joy, and praise your many  
holy names.

(Participants may now be invited to bless one another. Prayer shawls, pocket prayer shawls, or some other physical token may be distributed, if available. With consent, each participant is invited to place their hands on someone else's shawl/blessing token, hold one another's hands, raise hands toward them, or make some other gesture of blessing. All say: "May this shawl hold you through the blessings and burdens of bodies." OR, "May you be held through the blessings and burdens of bodies." All continue: "May you be reminded that all bodies are blessed, including yours.")

Go now, with reverence for all bodies,  
with gratitude for what your body knows,  
and with praise for the many bodies of God.  
Amen.

## **Music:**

Music for Access Sunday is available on our YouTube channel, including a new composition by Bekah Maren

Anderson and Jacob Nault in 2023. In addition, we have compiled a Spotify playlist of songs recommended by UCCDM board members for use in worship. You can find it at:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0omcBNTwTQapVsVyuayPoV?si=11a4244d768d43c3&pt=a7bb9c5564068d0afe4eaeae141ea720>

## **Sermon Discussion: Psalm 19**

Video: [https://youtu.be/iH\\_Cvn-0e5I](https://youtu.be/iH_Cvn-0e5I)

This is a transcript of a discussion held by members of the UCCDM Disability Theology Committee, exploring Psalm 19 from a disability perspective. You may use this discussion as inspiration for your own sermon, or play the video in place of a sermon during worship. Please credit individual board members for their ideas and quotes in this discussion.

Text: Psalm 19

Lectionary Sunday: Year A, 19th Sunday after Pentecost

Participants: Bekah Maren Anderson, Hannah Sachs, Stephanie Niemela, Kim Williams

Bekah:

Hello and welcome to this Access Sunday video. We will begin with a reading from our scripture, Psalm 19.

Kim:

This is from the new revised standard version updated edition.

To the leader, a psalm of David.

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech, and night by night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, their voice is not heard.

Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens, God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from God's wedding canopy. And runs like a strong man runs its course with joy.

It is rising ...

Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and nothing is hid from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold. Even much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned and keeping them there is great reward. But who can detect one's own errors?

Clear me from Hidden Faults. Keep back your servant also from the insolent. Do not let them have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you.

Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Bekah:

Thank you.

Welcome everyone. So for this Access Sunday, we would like to offer some reflections on this text, Psalm 19. My name is Bekah Maren Anderson. I am a member of the UCC Disabilities Ministries Board and serve on the Disability Theology subcommittee.

I am disabled and also ... have a cat. Here with me as part of our discussion. I'm legally blind and also queer.

And those pieces of me relate to how I approach all of scripture, including how I relate to this text.

And I have some other wonderful theologians here with me that I would love to invite to introduce themselves.

Hannah, would you like to start?

Hannah:

Sure. My name is Hannah Sachs. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm also a member of the Disability Ministry Board.

I am a pastor. I am technically the Minister of faith Formation at Rockspring, UCC in Arlington, Virginia.

And I also identify as disabled and queer, and like Bekah, those are not only important parts of my identity, they're important parts of my theological approach.

And I'm happy to be with you all today.

Bekah:

Okay, thank you, Hannah. And we also have Steph with us today. And would you like to introduce yourself?

Steph:

Yes, greetings from Michigan. I am a member in discernment and I identify as disabled and that informs my life, and theology.

Bekah:

Thank you. And, Kim, who read our scripture today. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Kim:

Yeah, I'm Kim Williams. She/her pronouns, and I am one of the new co-chairs of UCC Disabilities Ministries.

Bekah:

Yeah!

Kim:

And I'm also an authorized lay minister at Grace Community Church in Northport, California.

I also also identify as disabled and queer, and I have all of those fun invisible identities within those two umbrellas.

So, that's what I bring into the discussion today.

Bekah:

Awesome. Thank you all so much for joining me. So today we are talking about Psalm 19 and how this might be preached or read through a disability lens.

And one interesting line from that vantage point is in versus 3 and 4. "There is no speech, nor are there words, their voice is not heard. Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." So I'm wondering for all of you, how do you understand these verses?

And Steph, I'm wondering if you'd like to start us off.

Steph:

Sure, yeah, when I consider this, I think about ... I've been using the word multisensory when I think about the experience of God. Because if I consider ... and I'm just referencing this here ... "There are no words. Their voice is not heard." When I think about God being multi-sensory, everyone has their own experience. God, regardless of what their ability and disabilities are. And their way of relating to the world.

And so that feels much more ... The word would be expansive and wide. Of a way to understand God, and the way that God communicates with God's creation.

Bekah:

Absolutely.

Yeah, I'm really ... I'm really feeling that, Steph. I'm thinking a lot at the moment about the ways that speech and language gets kind of put on a pedestal by a lot of societies, and the ways that, you know, if you don't use words correctly—or, you know, quote unquote correctly—or if you don't use them at all: your intelligence or even your humanity is in question. And yet, there are so, so, so many ways to communicate things. You know, I'm thinking right now my cat has been interrupting our recording already. She doesn't use any words, but she communicates what she

wants very clearly. And you know, and I think about that in this text of, you know, the heavens, the whole of creation, communicating things, and having a speech like communication. That doesn't actually use words.

Hannah:

Right.

And one of the lines that strikes me is the juxtaposition between, "the voice is not heard, and yet their voice goes out through all the earth."

And I find that really interesting because I think so often, especially within the disability community, there are stories and there are voices that are not heard, whether that's because the communication is literally occurring in a way that's not considered normative, or simply because people are not open to hearing perspectives that are challenging to them.

But, that is still going out. That voice is still going out. And in the same way, creation is declaring God's glory.

And it's up to us whether or not we're going to notice that and take in that multisensory expression of glory.

But it's going out regardless.

Bekah:

Hmm. Yeah, I love that juxtaposition. Going out does does not mean that everything will be heard, but not being heard doesn't mean it's not present.

Kim:

And it's not just going out to like, your people or my people, or to our own individual networks.

Here, it's going up to the end of the world. It's got this wide reach so it it just ... it makes me think of, just the idea that, the ways that we participate, the ways that we are able to show up. Have that ripple effect.

So even, you know, so the heavens, their voice is not heard, but their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

It's this idea that, you know, what we're doing in our own small spaces has this effect that still goes out and is, and is creating this much larger movement.

Bekah:

Hmm. Yeah, that reminds me of the ways in which disability community can often be, quote unquote, small scale, right? You know, it's a few disabled friends coming together to, you know, help each other get groceries and, you know, help each other get into accessible spaces and, you know, make the difficult phone calls and logistics together. And like, you know, you could look at that and go like, that's staying right where it is, you know? That's not

going out and changing the world. But that those ripple effects really do affect things.

Yeah. So another interesting part of this text that we've kind of touched on a little bit here is, it's kind of describing the whole of the cosmos telling the glories of God, right?

You know, we've got, we start with the heavens are telling and then, you know, we go into all of these images and metaphors for what God is like and what God's communications are like.

And I'm wondering how you all see this relating to disability. This way in which divine communication is kind of on a cosmic scale.

Steph:

It makes me—oh go ahead, Hannah.

Hannah:

Well, I think it—oh, sorry, Steph. I was just gonna say that I think that one element of it that is resonant for me is that I don't always think about every single element of creation proclaiming God's glory.

Like I walk past a million parts of creation on a daily basis that I don't notice, or if I do notice them I don't maybe think about their further implications, or really let it impact me.

And so for me, just the global nature of this proclamation also impacts how I see other people and also parts of myself. Like, do I really look at every other person, or every part of every person, every part of my own body, of my own self and my own mind, and see that as a proclamation of God's glory? Maybe not.

And so for me it's also just a call to ... I like the word that was used before, just a more expansive recognition of the ways in which God's presence is made manifest.

Bekah:

Absolutely. What were you gonna say, Steph?

Steph:

And I was thinking about, the idea of still speaking, and in two ways. So, still speaking, meaning quietly or sensory speaking. Sensory communicating. And then still speaking, continuing to speak.

God, right, from the beginning of time, God's communicated. And until the end of time, whenever that is, God will communicate. And also with eco-theology, being a new branch—at least that I was exposed to in my last semester of seminary. Well, I hear about even the rocks would sing to God and glorify God. That's another way to engage with God's creation.

Bekah:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think all of that together, you know, really make it feel very necessary to think about how disabled bodyminds are proclaiming the glory of God, you know? That like, if we are talking about heavens and rocks and things, like we're saying that every part of creation proclaims the glory of God. We can't then turn around and say, but only some humans, only some kinds of bodies and minds, you know? We're saying this text is calling us to, as was said, a much more expansive understanding of proclamation.

Kim:

And you know, and in that, I am thinking of ... as a neurospicy person myself, I'm thinking about the lines ... So there's, you know, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." And then there's all these things about, you know, the precepts of the Lord or the decrees of the Lord are sure and there's examples in there. And I think that the ways that we read them sometimes create some division between like, perfection and wonder of all of creation, and the glory of all of creation. Because when I see making wise the simple as a person who thinks and does things very differently, thanks to my brain, I don't think that that's like a, "Boom!" you know, Magic Wand, we have made wise, like we've changed somebody.

I think that it's like ... It's this uncovering of how wise different brains are, how different minds think.

And the same thing, you know, it says the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes. And I love that because it's not a, you know, magic wand, healing thing. It is like an enlightening.

So it's not a, you know ... So often in scripture we're confronted with healing, whenever we have any metaphors that have to do with body parts, right?

And this one is an enlightening. It's a, you know, it doesn't ... It's clear, there's clarity there. There's not any need for anything to be different. I don't know. I just, I appreciate this one.

Because the way that we can read it through a disabled lens is just, God is, you know. God has created us and made us wise. And made us enlightened and ... yeah.

Hannah:

Something that I hear in what you're saying, Kim, and also in just this group's conversation as a whole, is that one thing this passage is not is a call to normativity.

Like, I think it's actually in the variety and diversity of creation that we find God's glory.

It's not like, oh, only in the most perfectly straight upright trees is God's glory displayed, or only in like the flowers with no lost petals, or you know ... And in the same way that creation is beautiful in its diversity, I think sometimes, like you were saying Bekah, we do this weird switch on our brains where somehow that doesn't apply to humans.

But I think that this text is a really beautiful reminder.

Steph:

That resonates with me as well. I was thinking about the medical model of disability, and how sometimes, you know, the notion of healing ... and I was thinking about a notion of management, symptom management. And accommodations, and the kinds of things that are important to my mindbody, that are very important to managing my mindbody. Give me the best opportunities to be who got calls, which is very different than, you know, get up and walk or get up and do this or not.

Giving me the best opportunity to be my spiritual whole. I've been calling things "wholly holy." So it's, wholly, W H O L L Y. And then, holy, H O L Y. Wholly holy. So fully who we are in God. And to me, management rather than heal. Is what the medical model of disability is about.

Bekah:

Yeah. Totally and like, I think one thing that I'm thinking about in relation to this conversation and reading the text is ... there's ... Oh, now I've fully lost the thought that I just had, that's unfortunate. But yeah, I love that sense of being wholly holy Steph, of being fully ourselves and fully in God as we're doing that.

Are there other thoughts that folks have on this text?

Hannah:

Cool, one thing that I'm always interested in ... I come from an ethnically Jewish family, and I've had a lot of exposure just to more traditionally Jewish interpretations of text, and I've loved studying Hebrew and things like that.

And so I'm very fascinated by the idea of glory as being a word that's also related to like, weightiness.

It's also related to like, giving honor or praise to someone, you know, in Hebrew.

All these words are so complicatedly related.

But I'm interested specifically in the idea of its weightiness, because it feels so tangible.

It feels so physical. And sometimes in my experience of Christianity, it can become really ethereal and really abstract.

And I think that does a disservice to disability theology and disabled people. Because when it becomes overly spiritualized, you know, there's kind of this sort of gnosticism happening where our spirits are held up as the true part of us, and our bodies are left behind.

But in this text, I feel like we get a reminder that God's glory, God's presence, is something experiential.

It's something physical and it's something that we can encounter with our real bodies, in the here and now.

And the weightiness is almost like gravity. It pulls us into it. And so I just find that image to be really helpful.

Bekah:

Oh, I love that so much, Hannah. The other thing that I'm thinking about that feels kind of like a contrast to how we, how in Christian circles we often think of things.

How much joy is in this text, particularly in relation to what this text term the commandments of God.

You know, I think a lot of the time we think about, you know, following God as something arduous and difficult and painful.

And, you know, I think like, doing what we are called to do as Christians is not always easy and it's not always joyful. But remembering that it really can be, and it doesn't ... things don't have to hurt in order to be good.

And that feels like a very disability resonant reminder to me. That I think so often disabled folks get put into positions where, you know, we are being asked to do things that really hurt, really are not good for our bodyminds, because that's just the way that it's supposed to be done.

And the reminder that, you know, proclaiming the glory of God, following in the way of God, doesn't have to hurt like that.

Steph:

You know, Bekah, when you share that, it brings to mind for me ... I think oftentimes within the community of disabled bodyminds, there's often so much creativity.

With what folks bring to how we do things, how we experience them, or how we get a particular test completed or just approach particular questions that may be similar and different than people who are of a different experience. Because we at least all share ... For my experience, I'm in my forties. And so, you know, accommodations and laws in our country, let alone Michigan and other spaces where I've lived have changed. So many ways that we got access in my life has changed and expanded and so, you know, I'm thinking of times when I was younger.

And maybe there wasn't a lift and I was climbing up, you know, stairs, and you're doing some other thing to do it, but getting it done.

And so I just think of the great creativity that I see within our very diverse community.

Bekah:

Yeah. Yeah. Our creativity allows us to find those ways to create more access and to do things differently.

Absolutely.

Well friends, I think we could continue this conversation for hours and hours if we wanted to. But any last words before we wrap up today?

Kim:

I just wanted to lift up the line that kind of comes in the end of this reading that's, "But who can detect one's own errors?"

I think that's a really good and important one, especially when we're talking about disability. Because I know that it's an uncomfortable topic for a lot of folks to talk about. People don't know how to approach, you know, do I say this? Do I not say that? What's the correct terminology? How do I ... you know? And I think that just, that lifting up, "Who can detect one's own errors? Clear me from hidden faults," in this particular Psalm is really important. Because we don't know until we know, right?

Like we only figure out what we are saying and doing that is ... maybe out of date, or is a term that we didn't know is derogatory or things like that. We don't know that until we say on accident and somebody calls us in and says, hey, maybe we don't say that.

Maybe we don't do that. And it's such an important part to growing and learning and embracing all of this beautiful glory of creation.

To, you know, talk about it. And talk to people and learn. You know, learn what we have maybe gotten wrong in the past and, you know, go forward from there. So I just wanted to lift that up.

Hannah:

And relatedly, I think in many churches I've been in, actually that final verse of this passage, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my hearts be acceptable to you, Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer,"

Those are words that are often said prior to a sermon in a prayer, and I think it's so interesting that that is where this declaration of glory and creation leads us. Is to kind of this experience of transformation, and I want to be changed. I want to be molded in a way that is good. And I just think that, to me, is another powerful kind of journey that this text takes us on. Is that an experience with God's glory and creation, both the natural world and in humans, disabled humans, leads to transformation.

Bekah:

Absolutely. Thank you, friends, so much for this discussion. Thank you for this time together. And may our contemplation of this text in our conversation together lead to transformation for us on the Zoom call, and for all who continue the conversation. Have a happy Access Sunday everyone.

Thank you.