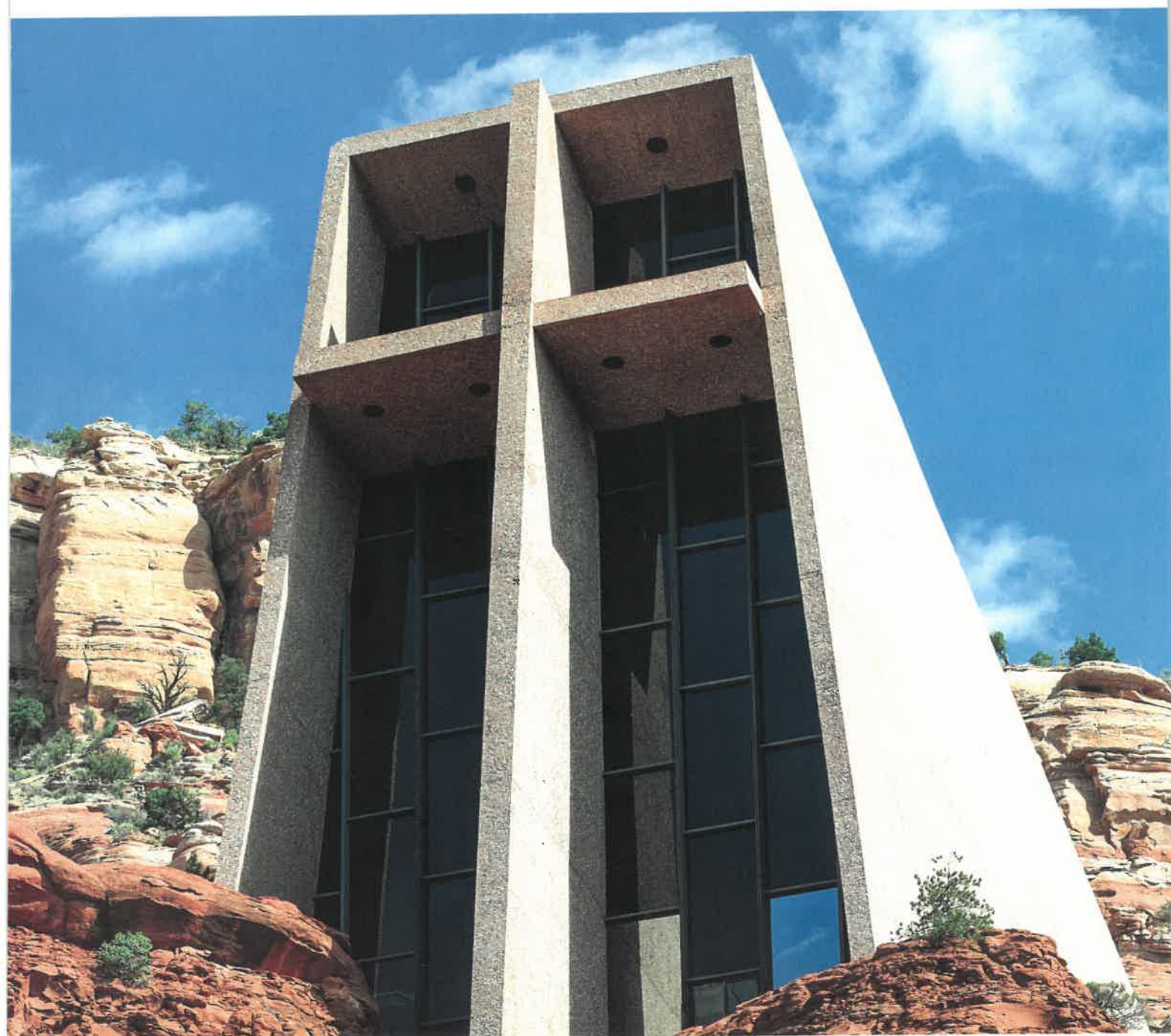


# Christ in Our Home

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July, August, September  
2020

**LARGE PRINT EDITION**



## **Prayers**

### **Morning**

Your death and resurrection are my strength and life, O Christ, raising me from fear into the joy of knowing that you are always near. May streams of peace and grace flow through my heart to all I touch this day.

Amen.

### **Evening**

You, Lord, are my rest. Only in you do I know the peace I crave. I release every thought and care into your love. Grant gentle rest this night, that I may rise to know you in the beauty of a new day. Amen.

### **Mealtime**

Jesus, you blessed bread and broke it to open the eyes of faith to your loving presence. Open our eyes to your presence at this table, that we may taste your goodness in the gifts you give and the love we share. Amen.

# Christ in Our Home

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JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 2020  
*Volume 67, Number 3*

Heidi Hyland Mann, Laurie J. Hanson, and Julie O'Brien, editors

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# Festivals and commemorations

*Bold type indicates a festival. Plain type indicates a commemoration.*

- Jul. 1 Catherine Winkworth, 1878; John Mason Neale, 1866; hymn translators
- Jul. 3 Thomas, Apostle
- Jul. 6 Jan Hus, martyr, 1415
- Jul. 11 Benedict of Nursia, Abbot of Monte Cassino, c. 540
- Jul. 12 Nathan Söderblom, Bishop of Uppsala, 1931
- Jul. 17 Bartolomé de Las Casas, missionary to the Indies, 1566
- Jul. 22 Mary Magdalene, Apostle**
- Jul. 23 Birgitta of Sweden, renewer of the church, 1373
- Jul. 25 James, Apostle**
- Jul. 28 Johann Sebastian Bach, 1750; Heinrich Schütz, 1672; George Frederick Handel, 1759; musicians
- Jul. 29 Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany; Olaf, King of Norway, martyr, 1030
- Aug. 8 Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), 1221
- Aug. 10 Lawrence, deacon, martyr, 258
- Aug. 11 Clare, Abbess of San Damiano, 1253
- Aug. 13 Florence Nightingale, 1910; Clara Maass, 1901; renewers of society
- Aug. 14 Maximilian Kolbe, 1941; Kaj Munk, 1944; martyrs
- Aug. 15 Mary, Mother of Our Lord**
- Aug. 20 Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, 1153
- Aug. 24 Bartholomew, Apostle**
- Aug. 28 Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, 430; Moses the Black, monk, martyr, c. 400
- Sept. 2 Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, bishop, renewer of the church, 1872
- Sept. 9 Peter Claver, priest, missionary to Colombia, 1654
- Sept. 13 John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, 407
- Sept. 14 Holy Cross Day**
- Sept. 16 Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, martyr, c. 258
- Sept. 17 Hildegard, Abbess of Bingen, 1179
- Sept. 18 Dag Hammarskjöld, renewer of society, 1961
- Sept. 21 Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist**
- Sept. 29 Michael and All Angels**
- Sept. 30 Jerome, translator, teacher, 420

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## **Broken and restored**

**Can I not do with you, O house of Israel,  
just as this potter has done? says the LORD. (v. 6)**

A young man struggling with his marriage came to me for counseling. Soon he revealed his involvement with another woman. After listening carefully, I asked whether he took seriously the promises he made before God when he was married. If he wanted to honor those vows, I said, he owed it to himself and his wife to talk through their problems with a professional marriage counselor. He could trust that God stood ready to heal him and his wife, whether their marriage could be salvaged or not.

The nation of Judah had promised to be faithful to God but did not honor its vow. Metaphorically, Judah went after other lovers. Or as Jeremiah says, “the vessel [the potter] was making . . . was spoiled in the potter’s hand” (v. 4). Yet that wasn’t the end. Through the prophet, God called the people to repent, turn from evil, and trust the one who had crafted them. Like a potter reshaping clay, God reshapes and restores us to life.

**Divine Potter, help us be faithful to you in response  
to your unwavering promise of love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Couples experiencing marital problems

**Psalm 119:161-168; Matthew 11:20-24**

## Fruitful

**. . . that we may bear fruit for God. (v. 4)**

As is common, the church where I'm a member compiles an extensive annual report detailing many ways in which members share and live out the gospel. It prompts us to rejoice and give thanks that we "belong . . . to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God." Because God transforms our lives through grace, we are empowered and moved to share that grace with the world in tangible ways.

This doesn't mean we are without sin. Indeed, at times it impedes our ministry, which is disheartening. But—following Paul's analogy in today's reading—because we are no longer "married" to the law but are joined to Christ, we don't get stuck in those moments. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection at work in us, we exchange forgiveness and go on. We rejoice that the Spirit of Christ lives in each of us and among us, freeing us from "our sinful passions" (v. 5) to focus on doing God's work.

**God, thank you for the grace that overcomes our sin  
so we can bear fruit for Jesus' sake. Amen.**

Prayer concern: The ministries of your congregation

**Psalm 145:8-14; Zechariah 1:1-6**



## **Thomas, Apostle**

**The gifts he gave were that some  
would be apostles . . . for building up  
the body of Christ. (vv. 11-12)**

Today we remember Thomas, who was given gifts to serve Jesus as an apostle. What are your gifts? Sometimes we need help to discern them.

I recall when someone first suggested what my gift might be in the life of the church. Waiting for my class's confirmation rehearsal to begin, I stepped into the pulpit to see how it would feel. I looked out over the sanctuary—just as the pastor walked in! I was afraid he would scold me, but he said, "Maybe that's where you'll be someday." Instead of seeing mischief in me, he saw gifts for pastoral ministry.

Tradition paints Thomas negatively as a doubter and maybe even irresponsible—not where he should have been when the risen Jesus appeared (John 20:19-31). In John 14:5 we might also see Thomas as a skeptic: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" But what if, instead, we caught a vision of someone with gifts for critical thinking, curiosity, and the willingness to raise important questions?

**For Jesus' sake, may we recognize our gifts  
for building up the church, and see your gifts  
in others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: The seven ELCA seminaries

**Judges 6:36-40; Psalm 136:1-4, 23-26; John 14:1-7**



## **Rejoicing in the kingdom of God**

### **The seventy returned with joy . . . (v. 17)**

Last Memorial Day my family and I visited Arlington National Cemetery, where we learned about particular fallen soldiers and placed roses of remembrance on their graves. We left feeling moved and grateful for our country, as citizens of other nations are surely proud of and thankful for theirs.

But every earthly “kingdom” pales compared to the kingdom of God. The psalmist declares to the Lord, “[Your faithful] shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power. . . . Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom” (Psalm 145:11, 13). Jesus, too, celebrates God’s kingdom when the seventy disciples return from their missions, joyful to have shared in its life-giving power.

We celebrate our nation (especially today) as well as our community, church, school, business . . . when they do life-giving work. But may we remember that God’s kingdom supersedes all, and any good that earthly entities accomplish is by God’s power and to God’s glory.

**God, as your kingdom breaks into our world,  
send us to be a part of it in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: The ministry of military chaplains

**Psalm 145:8-14; Zechariah 4:1-7**



## **Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 14**

**Take my yoke upon you . . . and you will find  
rest for your souls. (v. 29)**

A preaching conference I once attended defined a good sermon as one that issues an invitation to commit to Jesus. This may or may not be the definition of good preaching, but in today's reading Jesus does invite our commitment—though of a very different sort than we often think.

Why do we *not* commit to Jesus? Perhaps we want to manage our own life, carry a yoke of our own making. Or we fear a yoke of divine judgment and wrath, of working to be good enough, of earning salvation. Thankfully, Jesus offers instead his unconditional love, grace and forgiveness, rest and refreshment—a yoke that is easy because he carries it with us and for us.

Commitment to Jesus does involve work, part of which is to resist controlling our own life and choosing our own yoke. But he also urges us to commit to the true and healthy rest he alone can give: rest from striving after salvation, love, righteousness—for they have already been laid on us gently and for free.

**In Jesus' name, may we say yes  
to the invitation to trust him. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Pastors as they preach God's word

**Psalm 145:8-14; Zechariah 9:9-12; Romans 7:15-25a**

## **The source of renewal**

**His eternal power and divine nature . . .  
have been . . . seen through the things  
he has made. (v. 20)**

According to a 2018 poll from the Pew Research Center, 29 percent of respondents said they believe astrology is somewhat or very scientific, able to provide at least some direction for life. In what ways do we seek guidance from, serve, or even worship creation instead of the Creator? Or perhaps our gods are things of our *own* creating: social systems, overachievement, wealth.

Paul was deeply concerned about the early Christians' misplaced devotion. God is revealed *through* creation, he wrote, but to place trust in anything other than God is "futile" and "senseless" (v. 21). God wants to save us from false gods and their consequences by offering us what only the Creator can: self-giving relationship; unconditional love; the counsel not of stars but of a God who knows what it is to be human, listens to our cries, and responds in love. In creation we glimpse God's glory, but the "power of God for salvation" (v. 16) is revealed in Jesus Christ.

**Creator God, help me to give thanks  
for your gifts of creation but to worship only you.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People seeking to know God

**Psalm 131; Jeremiah 27:1-11, 16-22**

## **Comfort and challenge**

**Will . . . faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! (vv. 3-4)**

In Sunday school I learned many wonderful songs from two musically gifted women—sisters, in fact. I don't recall their names, but I remember the simple, gospel-themed songs they taught us—songs with two basic messages. I heard comfort in the clear message that God cherishes us and will never abandon us. I especially remember singing "Jesus, like a shepherd lead us; much we need thy tender care." The songs also issued a challenge: we are called to be faithful to this God who is so faithful to us.

Paul lifts up those same themes throughout his letter to the Romans. We can take comfort in God's lavish grace revealed first in the law and the prophets ("the oracles of God"—v. 2) and then through Christ. But what if we're unfaithful? "Will [our] faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!" Paul reassures us. And the flip side of such good news is the challenge: to strive anew to be faithful, as God is so steadfastly committed to us.

**Lord Jesus, we give thanks for both the comfort and the challenge of your word. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Sunday school teachers

**Psalm 131; Jeremiah 28:10-17**

## **The way to peace**

### **My soul is like the weaned child that is with me. (v. 2)**

A footnote in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible points to a slightly different way to translate this verse: "My soul within me is like a weaned child." This brief psalm carries a tone of calm trust. But the weaning process can be a challenge.

It's hard at first for a little one to understand being denied the comfort of nursing. When Mama offers a cup instead, the child doesn't grasp what's going on and cries or rages. A toddler may think comfort is found only in nursing. But soon the child learns the goodness of other foods and enters a broader, deeper relationship with Mom.

Like a child being weaned, we sometimes feel God is denying us the only comfort we know. We cry and rage. But what if God is preparing us for even more satisfying "food"? God's love continues, shared in new ways, and we grow into a deeper relationship with God than we previously knew. We learn to trust all the forms of nurturing care God offers.

**Mothering God, thank you for loving us  
wholeheartedly and nourishing us with your  
very self. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Mothers and mother-figures

**Jeremiah 13:1-11; John 13:1-17**

## **Renewing God's creation**

**When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,  
you forgive our transgressions. (v. 3)**

What did the psalmist have in mind, interrupting praise for God's creation with the words "deeds of iniquity overwhelm us"? When struck by the wonders of nature, we may also be overwhelmed. For instance, in a New Jersey-size zone in the Gulf of Mexico, life no longer exists due to oxygen depletion caused by agricultural fertilizer runoff into the Mississippi River. As disciples of Jesus, how do we respond to problems like that?

We let words such as Psalm 65, and the witness of creation, call us to lament and confess. We are all part of the problem as we benefit from technology that causes harm even as it puts food on our tables, clothes in our closets, computers on our desks. Ecological crises have no simple fixes, but as God's forgiveness washes over us, we commit anew to advocate for policy reform, support "green" organizations, buy local more often. We pray for wisdom and celebrate the mountains and seas, hills and valleys, flocks and grains as God's gift to the world.

**Through Christ our Lord, we give thanks for the gift  
of creation. May we use it wisely. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Organizations caring for creation

**Isaiah 48:1-5; Romans 2:12-16**

## Crucial reminders

**On some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder. (v. 15)**

Thank God for calendars, datebooks, and all the other devices that remind us of personal appointments, meetings, and social events. My wife keeps us on track through the use of a whiteboard where she lists important events for the week. It certainly helps hold our lives together. Where would we be without such reminders? If left to our memories alone, undoubtedly we would miss some critical events and important occasions.

Drawing close to the end of his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul explains that he has “written . . . rather boldly” in order to remind this church of what is most important. It’s as if he has written on a whiteboard in extra-thick black marker “REMEMBER . . .” and then has specified his key teachings: *You are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. In Christ you are given new life. God’s love is unconditional. Share this message with others through your words and deeds.*

**Lord Jesus, thank you for reminding us of your great love for us. Help us to share that love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: ELCA Global Mission

**Psalm 65:1-13; Isaiah 48:6-11**



## **God's good intentions for us**

**Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion!  
... here am I. (vv. 1, 6)**

When I was very young, I went through a traumatic illness. It was more than I could deal with. I felt alone, hopeless, abandoned by God. Of course, that wasn't the case. Though invisible to me, God was working in many and various ways to restore me to health and wholeness. God especially worked through the members of my church, who regarded me as a precious child of God and enfolded me in their care.

Exiled from their homeland, the Israelites felt alone, hopeless, and abandoned by God. They doubted that God could—or would—restore them to freedom and well-being. But through the prophet Isaiah, God calls them to attention: *Wake up!* Indeed, God has plans to restore them and to bless the world through them. Likewise, God commands each of us to “awake” and trust God. We are God's precious children. Even if we can't always perceive it, God is active and working on our behalf. God's intentions have always been to restore us and all creation.

**Lord God, may we awaken to the goodness  
of your will for all people and share your  
love generously. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who feel abandoned

**Psalm 65:1-13; John 12:44-50**



## Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 15

### Listen! A sower went out to sow. (v. 3)

This is a complex parable that has probably been interpreted as many ways as there are preachers, teachers, and commentators. Often I find the explanations overly simplistic: the rocky soil is so-and-so, the thorns are this and that, and of course we (whoever is interpreting and listening) are the good soil, ever receptive to the word of God and bearing fruit abundantly.

We would do well to focus instead on God. *Wherever* seed sprouts and flourishes, it is due to God's goodness. The grace is that God, the sower, does not scrimp with the seed for fear of wasting some or try to restrain seed to the "right" soil in the "sensible" places, but God sows broadly. Even in the "good" soil some seeds produce better than others, but that's not the point. The point is that the Sower sows—lavishly, continually. So despite "trouble . . . and the cares of the world" (vv. 21, 22), we can trust that the seed, the word of God, *will* bear much fruit.

**Lord God, thanks for the gift of your word. Help it to flourish in us, through Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Gardeners

**Psalm 65:1-13; Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:1-11**

## **The habit of thanksgiving**

**It is good to give thanks to the LORD,  
to sing praises to your name,  
O Most High. (v. 1)**

A friend told me about an experience his young son had at the dentist. Not surprisingly, the dentist instructed the boy to brush his teeth regularly. He responded, "You mean I have to brush my teeth *every day*?" The dentist replied, "Only the ones you want to keep."

Like the dentist, the psalmist knows there are certain practices essential to life. It is to our benefit to follow them and to our detriment if we don't. One such practice is regularly giving thanks to God for God's abundant blessings: remembering God's love each morning, acknowledging God's faithfulness each night, sometimes in spoken words, sometimes with music. It's not that *God* needs this from us; it's that if we fail to make this practice a habit, our own lives are diminished. Our thinking might become flawed as we stray onto harmful paths or focus only on life's difficulties and not on God's care and help.

**God, remind me of your abundant blessings,  
that I may give thanks and praise your name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Dentists and dental hygienists

**Leviticus 26:3-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**

## Reconciling love

**. . . to put away your former way of life . . . to clothe yourselves with the new self. (vv. 22, 24)**

A seminary professor recounted what had prompted him to become a Christian. While reading a book by German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed in 1945 for working against Hitler and the Nazis, the professor was deeply moved. He said Bonhoeffer's witness created a desire in him to become part of something greater than himself. Almost immediately he called a Lutheran pastor to talk about and get insight into what he was experiencing. They had a long discussion about God's grace and its consequences, and a few days later he was baptized.

The writer of Ephesians is conveying this very thing: the consequences of God's grace. Before we are moved by God's grace, we tend to live out of self-centeredness. After we recognize the gift of God's grace, we desire to live for others, become part of something greater than ourselves, put on a new way of life, and be part of God's grand project to reconcile the world.

**Lord Jesus, your grace clothes us in righteousness and holiness. May we respond by living in love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Theologians and teachers of the faith

**Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Psalm 92**

## **Wisdom for living**

**A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water. (v. 25)**

Who has shared wisdom with you? Maybe parents, grandparents, or teachers taught you sayings like “A stitch in time saves nine” or gave you guidance from scripture—maybe even from Proverbs, like “A soft answer turns away wrath” (15:1).

Proverbs consists of wisdom sayings gathered over Israel’s history. Though attributed to King Solomon, the teachings’ origins are unknown. Elders likely used them to teach young people to live wise, godly lives—much like today. While some sayings in Proverbs are what we would call common sense—like “A generous person will be enriched” (though not necessarily financially)—the challenge is that much in this book makes little sense to us, set as it is in another time, place, and culture.

While we thank God for those who compiled and passed Proverbs on to us, we find in Jesus the source of all wisdom. Jesus told us that loving God and neighbor is the wisest way to live. As Paul wrote, “Christ [is] the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

**Jesus, thanks for all who have helped us grow in you, the true source of wisdom. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Elders passing wisdom on to youth

**Psalm 92; Matthew 13:10-17**

## **Clocks, lists, and grace**

**From the rising of the sun he was  
summoned by name. (v. 25)**

King Cyrus of Persia is the one who was summoned by God to deliver Israel from exile. But another credible translation reads “he shall call on my name” (NRSV footnote). God calls us to certain tasks, *and* we call on God’s help to fulfill them.

I wake about the same time each day. Before my feet hit the floor, I’m running through my to-do list: Thursday—music class at daycare, text study, moms’ group, dinner planning. What about calling on God’s name “from the rising of the sun” to help me focus on and fulfill the tasks to which God has called me? I confess it wasn’t the first thing on my list.

The lists are long and the days short. When I’m attentive to the clock, it’s hard to attend to the Spirit. Thankfully, there is grace for that. Tomorrow I can try again. Or what if I started now? God is present in this moment just as in the morning. God’s love calls us in all times and places, and God hears our calls in return.

**God of creation, may the sun’s warmth  
be a reminder of your constancy, love, and grace  
for all. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those whose schedules are full

**Psalm 86:11-17; Hebrews 2:1-9**

## **Anchored in God**

**We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. (v. 19)**

My two-year-old loves all things planes, trains, automobiles—and now boats! In one of our books there are pictures of all different boats, from big ships to small fishing boats. Some of the large ships include anchors in the illustration, and my inquisitive little one loves asking, “What is that?”

“An anchor,” I explain. “It’s big and heavy, and it goes all the way down to the ground underneath the water. It helps hold the boat in place, even when big waves and strong currents try to move the boat.” Now we point out the anchor every time it is pictured.

The current in our lives is constant, and the waves always come, sometimes big and sometimes small. There are ups and downs. There are days when the wind blows hard and days when the breeze is soft and refreshing. Anchored in God, we cling to a sure and steadfast hope that Jesus has gone before us and opened for us the way of eternal life.

**Grant steadfast hope to anchor our lives in you,  
O God, despite the wind, waves, and currents. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those in need of hope

**Psalm 86:11-17; Isaiah 44:9-17**



## **Not my first rodeo**

**You, LORD, have helped me  
and comforted me. (v. 17)**

When I was in college, each time finals rolled around I agonized about all the things I had to finish, lost under the weight of stress and perfectionism. I spent the first few semesters of college like this, feeling like I was barely keeping my head above water. Eventually I realized everything would always get done because, in semesters past, everything always got done. Between coffee and late nights, finals got finished—even when it seemed impossible.

This psalm speaks of challenges yet also of trust that God will bring the writer through. This is not the psalmist's first rodeo; there have been struggles before, and God has heard and helped. Once more the writer calls out to God in trust that God will show up again.

As with my college finals, I now look to the past and find strength for the moment. God has brought me through before, God will bring me through again, and God will hear my cries for help.

**You alone, O God, are worthy of our trust  
and attentive to our cries; come and  
comfort us. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those experiencing stress

**Isaiah 44:18-20; Matthew 7:15-20**



## **Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 16**

**Collect the weeds first and bind them . . .  
to be burned, but gather the wheat  
into my barn. (v. 30)**

I have heard many sermons about choosing to be wheat rather than weeds as if the weeds chose to be weeds and the wheat chose to be wheat. Other teachers focus on the weeds being bound and burned, the old “burn in the fire” evangelism scare tactic. I don’t believe that is the point of this parable. I can’t imagine it any more than I can picture loving parents harming their children.

The weeds don’t serve much purpose after harvest. However, the wheat is given a challenging future as well. It will be ground down into flour and mixed with other ingredients, and finally, the mixture will be put in the oven and then given away as bread for the world. The grinding, mixing, and baking can be messy and challenging.

We, like the wheat, may feel like we are being ground down to become flour. We are mixed together like dough with other people, mixed with their gifts and passions in this messy, beautiful thing called the body of Christ. Finally, as Jesus gives the bread, his body, for each of us (Luke 22:19), we too give ourselves away in love.

**Self-giving God, nourish us so that we may nourish  
and care for others, as bread for the world. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Farmers and their crops

**Psalm 86:11-17; Isaiah 44:6-8; Romans 8:12-25**

## **The whole world in God's hands**

**When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants,  
it is I who keep its pillars steady. (v. 3)**

When I lived in Peru, we often experienced tremors and minor earth-"shakes." The experts say that Peru is overdue for a big earthquake, and I frequently wondered, "What if this tremor is the big one?" Depending on which host family I was staying with, the home either had a clear path to the street and a safer area or poor odds of survival in the event of an earthquake.

We often receive news of fires, hurricanes, natural disasters, and human-made disasters—the list is endless. Often the news reports make it seem like the whole earth is tottering, crumbling, and falling apart. Our communities, our nations, and our world is broken; yet in these disasters we see so clearly our need of God.

God promises that the whole world and all its inhabitants are in God's hands. Nothing else—not family, friends, ideologies, political parties, or leaders—holds the pillars of the world steady. When it feels like all teeters on the edge, God still holds us steady. Thanks be to God!

**God of assurance, steady the world, calm our communities, and bring peace to our hearts. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those in need of stability and peace

**Nahum 1:1-13; Revelation 14:12-20**

## Freedom for what?

### **For freedom Christ has set us free. (v. 1)**

Freedom is a great American value, but American freedom is quite different from freedom in Christ. As a teenager I longed for each new freedom: at sixteen, freedom to drive; at eighteen, freedom to be considered an adult; at twenty-one, freedom to drink alcohol. My desire for freedom was for and about myself. It had nothing to do with anyone else. In the same way, much of our culture seems to long for and fight for this reckless abandon of freedom, a golden ideal.

The apostle Paul contends that we have been set free in Christ, but it is not a wild freedom from restraint. To be freed by Christ is to be freed from the grim results of life lived estranged from God. Reconciled to God, our freedom is like that of Christ, a freedom devoted to serving others in love. It is not self-seeking or self-gratifying, but it is freedom to be with and for others in love.

**Liberate us, O Christ, from the bonds we make for ourselves, and help us live into your freedom. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those lacking basic freedoms

**Psalm 75; Zephaniah 3:1-13**

## **Mary Magdalene, Apostle**

**Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.” (v. 18)**

Mary Magdalene was the first person ever to preach the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. Unfortunately, this first sermon is often overlooked; the voices of women are often silenced or discredited, their words minimized.

While the other disciples are hiding in their homes, Mary goes to Jesus’ grave. However, she doesn’t realize he has been raised. She thinks the body has been stolen and starts weeping; when Jesus speaks to her, she doesn’t recognize him at first and accuses him of taking the body. Nevertheless, she is there—she showed up.

Mary shows up at the tomb and encounters Jesus, not with all the right words or even a complete understanding of what had happened. But then she does what Jesus commands and announces the resurrection.

Following Jesus isn’t about getting it right all the time; it is about showing up, listening, and sharing where we see Jesus. It is about taking action, trusting that God will equip us.

**May we hear the voices on the margins and see,  
O Risen One, what you’re up to in our midst. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those whose voices  
are silenced or not heard

**Ruth 1:6-18; Psalm 73:23-28; Acts 13:26-33a**

## **Toddlers, tantrums, and rules**

**Your decrees are wonderful;  
therefore my soul keeps them. (v. 129)**

My parents love to recount my childhood antics. They say I was debating at three years old, I loved the word “no,” and I was a stubborn, strong-willed child. My father particularly likes seeing my toddler following in my footsteps; he laughs and declares, “Payback!” Though now I am mostly a rule follower, sometimes I still wrestle with the rules and want to do things my way.

This psalm speaks of the greatness of God’s word, the desire to follow God’s will for how we live with one another, and the plea for God to assist us in living by God’s word. The passage ends with a recognition of both the individual’s and the community’s inability to keep God’s law.

Left to my own devices, I cannot follow God or fulfill the law. I need God’s help daily, sometimes moment to moment, to live in community, to love others, and to follow God. The psalmist says to God, “Turn to me and be gracious to me . . . keep my steps steady” (vv. 132, 133). I need this too.

**Gracious God, keep our steps steady,  
redeem us from our shortcomings,  
and help us follow you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who have broken the law

**1 Kings 1:28-37; 1 Corinthians 4:14-20**

## Where God lives

**Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses  
made with human hands. (v. 48)**

“Stop running!” shouted the exasperated mother as her two small children hurtled down the church corridor. Then she said, “This is *God’s* house!” Our children’s minister comforted the embarrassed parent, saying, “I love it when I see children play here; it means they are comfortable. *That is what we want!*”

While our church building certainly is God’s house, or one of God’s homes, it is not the only place God lives. Several longtime members once chided me for preaching that God isn’t only found at church. “Don’t tell people that!” they said. “They might not come to church.” Yet we’re in the midst of summer—a time busy with vacations, camp, mission trips, and more. Wherever we go, God goes with us.

So whether stargazing at night, spending days on a boat, or traveling squished in a car on a road trip—whatever summer looks like for you—pay attention to the many ways God’s goodness is there in the midst of it all.

**May we see you, O God, and know you in new ways  
every day and in every place. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Youth at camp and on service trips

**1 Kings 1:38-48; Psalm 119:129-136**



## James, Apostle

### **You do not know what you are asking. (v. 38)**

For me, parenting was a quick lesson in letting go of myself to look out for the needs of another. This tiny human became the focal point and the one whose needs set the schedule; our old routines were replaced with a feeding and naptime regimen.

In today's text, James and John argue about sitting next to Jesus in glory, but Jesus knows the road they are on. James and John haven't grasped where this path leads, but they will. Later we read, "King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword" (Acts 12:1-2).

In many places today, following Jesus likely won't mean actual persecution or martyrdom. But elsewhere confessing faith in Christ is dangerous, even life-threatening.

At the very least, Jesus calls us to serve one another, to prioritize others above our pursuit of glory. There isn't much glory in diaper duty, but there is great joy and love.

**Help us, Lord Jesus, to let go of pursuing glory and instead follow you in a life of service. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People persecuted for their faith

**1 Kings 19:9-18; Psalm 7:1-10; Acts 11:27–12:3a**



## **Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 17**

**... the master of a household  
who brings out of his treasure  
what is new and what is old. (v. 52)**

As a child I had a treasured teddy bear I named Bear Bear. Bear Bear accompanied me on every adventure, real or imaginary. I would not have traded this beloved companion for all the treasure in the world.

Today's reading demonstrates that people are willing to trade all they have in exchange for the new, invaluable treasure that is the kingdom of heaven. Only God's kingdom is compelling enough to prompt us to sell everything in exchange for it, because it offers so much more than we can imagine.

Some parables suggest that an old treasure must be traded for a new one. This parable, however, indicates that the kingdom of heaven will have treasure of all kinds: old and new, shiny and tarnished, ancient wisdom and new understanding, perfect and imperfect skills—shared in sincerity. It's much like my Bear Bear who, though faded and falling apart, is kept safe and still counted precious.

**Bring your kingdom near, O God, so we may know  
and see you in new ways each day. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Church and community elders

**1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:129-136; Romans 8:26-39**

## **Justice and compassion**

**They perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice. (v. 28)**

This story of King Solomon determining the true mother of the living baby highlights his wisdom and the people's awe of him—no doubt terrific for the sake of Solomon's public relations.

A primary responsibility of the king is to execute justice, which he does through God-given wisdom. However, Solomon's "success" seems to ignore the deep grief of a mother who has lost a child. Solomon's tactics seem to toy with the life of another child. It serves as a reminder that justice can fall short of compassion for those caught in the crosshairs and those on the margins.

When my toddler acts out, there is often a root cause of the behavior. If I respond only with justice, I miss the real problem. God is teaching me as I parent that often I need to approach first with compassion to understand, and then act with justice when necessary. Beyond parenting—in the wider world and across all relationships—to balance compassion and justice is true wisdom.

**Compassionate God, grant us wisdom to balance the needs for compassion and justice. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who have lost a child

**Psalm 119:121-128; James 3:13-18**

## **Ducks fly together**

### **Put on the whole armor of God. (v. 11)**

As a child, I loved the movie *The Mighty Ducks*. A self-centered, washed-up hockey star is charged with transforming a ragtag band of young misfits into a hockey team. Their rallying cry is “Ducks fly together!” They can’t be successful alone; they must play as a team.

Clearly the world is not as God intends. To ward off harmful forces we need “the whole armor of God”: the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the sword of God’s word. But, notably, there is no armor listed to cover our backs. Maybe this is because we need to function as a team, protecting one another. It is up to us to “have each other’s back.”

Ephesians says our struggle is with forces beyond this world. Indeed, we need the whole armor of God, and the whole people of God, to watch our backs. Sometimes the people of God look like a ragtag band of misfits, but our coach is Jesus—and he’s a champion. We “fly together” and follow Christ’s lead.

**God, things are not as they should be.**

**Save us from evil; help us care for each other**

**as Jesus taught. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Youth sports teams and their coaches

**1 Kings 4:29-34; Psalm 119:121-128**

## **Catnip and the “kin-dom” of God**

**With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?**

**(v. 30)**

Catnip has taken over our yard: we cut it back, but it pops back up in unexpected places. While we get frustrated, neighboring cats love it. I cannot help but think the catnip is a bit like the mustard seed of Jesus' parable.

Though it starts out small, the mustard plant grows large enough, says Jesus, to be a shady refuge for creatures. A seemingly insignificant shrub, or weed, becomes a haven to those in need. But you can't control weeds; they pop up on their own even when you try to prevent or remove them.

The kingdom of God too pops up in unexpected places and people. The term “kin-dom” has been adopted by some Christians to replace the outdated, patriarchal image of king with the image of family. In God, we are relatives—kin. We don't always appreciate or value each other. But the kin-dom of God sprouts, made up of all of us together, to bring shade to those in need of rest and provide a home to those in need of community.

**O God, help us create places and spaces  
of welcome, community, and rest for all.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People in need of safety

**Psalm 119:121-128; Proverbs 1:1-7, 20-33**

## **Strength for the journey**

### **I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me. (v. 13)**

One summer I served on staff at a Bible camp. Philippians 4:13 was our theme verse. As the summer progressed, we realized the many situations to which this verse could apply, giving staff, counselors, and campers courage to move forward. The verse encouraged homesick campers, counselors worried about cabin dynamics, youth nervous about trying a new activity, staff members unsure of their ability to lead.

We also learned that Christ may strengthen us in unexpected ways. One staff person lost a family member to a long-term illness. We had hoped our theme verse held out promise that the loved one would recover. Instead, the words “I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me” became consolation, lending the staff person courage and strength amid grief.

Above all, we learned that summer that Christ strengthens us to live as disciples and servants, sustained by and sharing God’s love.

**O Christ, thank you for your strength that holds us  
and empowers us for all that life brings. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who are grieving

**Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Proverbs 10:1-5**

## **The breadth of God's character**

**The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. (v. 9)**

I am struck by the repeated use of the word “all” in this passage. It appears over a dozen times: God is good to *all*, has compassion over *all*, upholds *all*, raises up *all*. And then, *all* look to God.

Who is this “all”? Clearly, the words of the psalm are not limited to the Israelite community. Neither, then, can they be limited to those gathered at a Christian worship service. There is great breadth to the inclusivity here; God cares for all humankind and all creation.

Verse by verse, this psalm names God's characteristic activity in the world. The praise in this reading serves as a confession of faith: this is who God is and what God does. The final verse changes to first-person perspective: *I will praise the Lord forever*. But not just “I”—indeed, “all flesh” will bless God forever (v. 21).

The only possible response to God's activity with and for all is praise.

**God of all, help us to see all people and all of creation as precious and beloved to you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People who feel excluded by the church

**Isaiah 51:17-23; Romans 9:6-13**



## **In God's hands**

**Ask, and it will be given you; search,  
and you will find; knock, and the door  
will be opened. (v. 7)**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught much about life in the kingdom of God. A sampling: Jesus acknowledged that we face loss and grief but promised that “those who mourn . . . will be comforted” (5:4). He taught us to pray that not our will but “[God’s] will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (6:10). He reminded us that God cares for the lilies and the birds and thus surely cares for us (6:25-33). When I was sick with cancer ten years ago, these counsels were sometimes hard to remember. But they also offered reassurance.

In today’s reading Jesus invites us to be persistent: to ask, search, and knock on heaven’s door in prayer. By the power of the Holy Spirit I prayed for healing. Then, knowing I couldn’t control the outcome, I placed my life in God’s hands. As I struggled with treatments or to care for my sons, God sent help. I was not cured immediately, but God answered my prayers by helping me define *healing* in new ways.

**God of grace, remind us to seek serenity, courage,  
and wisdom when we ask for help. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People fighting cancer

**Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Isaiah 44:1-5**



## **Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 18**

**[Jesus] saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. (v. 14)**

After surgery for a torn tendon, I was told to stay off my feet. When I first got home, all I wanted was a nap, but my young sons crawled all over me, inspecting my cast. I saw they were upset, so I read them a story, reassuring them I was okay. Then they went to play dinosaurs, and I got my nap.

Today's reading follows the death of John the Baptist. Jesus sails off to be alone in his grief. But the townspeople, focused on their own needs, walk around the lake to meet him. Coming ashore, Jesus sees their needs and "[has] compassion for them and [cures] their sick." Later he provides for them in the famous feeding of more than five thousand people.

Jesus' healing and feeding of the people were miracles. But the first blessing was that he had compassion on them. When I placed my sons' needs ahead of my own, I was doing my best to follow Jesus' lead. May I do so every day and with all people.

**Jesus, source of all nourishment, thank you for your abundant compassion; may I share it with others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People healing from accidents

**Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Isaiah 55:1-5; Romans 9:1-5**

## Community of faith

**. . . so that we may be mutually encouraged  
by each other's faith. (v. 12)**

As a kindergartner I didn't understand the liturgy at worship, and the wooden benches in my hometown Kansas church were hard. I wiggled and squirmed. As a child, of course, I went to church because my mother took me. That changed as I progressed through confirmation, high school, and college. I started to feel part of something bigger. I sang in the choir, played the organ, and hung out with church friends.

After moving to Seattle, my husband and I raised our sons as my family raised me: baptism, Sunday school, confirmation. And though I wasn't in Kansas anymore, the rhythm of worship was key: familiar and comforting.

Paul could not be with the Roman church, so he wrote to encourage them to turn to their community for support and continuity. To me that is a big part of why Christians gather for worship, service, and growth in Christ. As a fellowship of believers, we work together to share the kingdom of God with all.

**Holy Spirit, inspire our community to support  
one another as we gather to worship you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those striving to raise kids  
in the church

**Deuteronomy 8:1-10; Psalm 78:1-8, 17-29**

## **Let us break bread together**

**They broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts. (v. 46)**

I looked forward to Great-Aunt Pauline and Great-Uncle Wally's annual visit. They drove twelve hundred miles to stay for a week. That Saturday my grandparents and mother hosted a big family dinner. Grandpa always said grace. We kids ate in the breakfast room while the adults sat at the expanded dining-room table. On Sunday we went to church, and on Monday my aunt and uncle started the drive home. I remember those meals better than holiday meals because we were all together.

Paul wrote about early Christians sharing time over meals. This fellowship, along with the "wonders and signs . . . done by the apostles" (v. 43), the sharing of goods so that none had need, and their regular worship in the temple, gained them favor among the people, and "the Lord added to their number" (v. 47).

Today, too, churches often gather over food: pancake breakfasts, potluck dinners, cookie exchanges, and—above all—the Lord's supper. May others see that our joy in food and fellowship is grounded in Jesus, the bread of life.

**Lord Jesus, may our fellowship at your table inspire us to live out our faith at home. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those eating alone by choice or not

**Deuteronomy 26:1-15; Psalm 78:1-8, 17-29**

## **A message of inclusiveness**

**Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. (v. 38)**

When my husband and I joined a church in a Seattle suburb, I was impressed by the congregation's inclusivity. Any baptized and confirmed member, regardless of age or gender, could vote at congregational meetings and was welcome to help with the worship service as an usher, assisting minister, or communion server. What's more, we had women pastors—something completely new to me, as I had grown up in a church where women could have no formal role in worship.

While I was teaching Sunday school, the focus of one lesson was on Jesus' miracle of using so little food to feed such a large crowd—four thousand! But that number only accounted for the men. Jesus performed another blessing: in a patriarchal society, Jesus had compassion for and served women and children too. The gospel reveals the inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry: all are welcome, and his compassion extends to all.

**Jesus our Savior, help us spread the good news of the inclusiveness of your kingdom. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People who feel excluded

**Exodus 16:2-15, 31-35; Psalm 78:1-8, 17-29**

## **A missionary's tale**

**Then the believers immediately sent Paul away to the coast. (v. 14)**

Paul's second missionary journey took him to Asia and Greece, including the three prominent Greek cities of Thessalonica, Beroea, and Athens. Believers in the first city sent Paul away to Beroea for his own safety, where people "welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day" (v. 11). But unbelievers in Thessalonica traveled to Beroea "to stir up and incite the crowds" against Paul (v. 13). Believers hurried Paul to the coast, then on to Athens.

What a harrowing tale! Hounded because of his bold proclamation of Jesus the Messiah, Paul ran for his life. I imagine Paul hugging the shadows of buildings to escape detection. He was a man on a mission, never sure who would accept God's message of salvation. But he knew God's light always traveled with him. As one of the first missionaries, he was a beacon of conviction and hope then—and is so now.

**Christ our Savior, give us courage to share your gift of salvation through word and deed. Amen.**

Prayer concern: ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission

**1 Kings 18:1-16; Psalm 85:8-13**

## **Course corrections**

**You, O LORD, are God, and . . . have turned  
[the people's] hearts back. (v. 37)**

I knew I was in trouble when my first-grade teacher told me to stay after school. That afternoon, my grandmother had to wait while I wrote "I will not talk in class" ten times on the chalkboard. Though surely minor compared with the episode of Ahab and Elijah, it made a huge impression on me as a young child and led to a marked course correction: for the rest of my school career, I talked with friends only at recess and lunch.

On a far grander scale, God used the prophet Elijah to call King Ahab and Israel from worshiping false gods. When fire consumed the (drenched) altar Elijah had erected to God—and the stones, dust, and water besides!—it made, shall we say, a huge impression on the children of God. "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, 'The LORD indeed is God'" (v. 39).

Who has God used to help you make a course correction as a disciple of Jesus? Give God thanks for that person and episode, even if it was unpleasant at the time.

**God, thank you for loving me enough to provide  
course corrections. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Law enforcement professionals

**Psalm 85:8-13; Acts 18:24-28**

## **At one with God**

### **Righteousness and peace will kiss each other. (v. 10)**

My treatment for breast cancer was brutal. I had a lumpectomy, thirty-two doses of radiation, four years of medication, and another operation to address the side effects of that drug. On the Sundays I was well enough to go to church, I sensed God's love holding me close. It streamed down through the skylight, enveloping me and creating a safe space around me. It felt like a warm blanket wrapped around me.

Scholars explain the biblical term *righteousness* as being one with God in spirit and the term *peace* as being complete or living well. During worship, in those brief moments of contemplative prayer, quiet song, or responsive reading of a psalm, I experienced God's righteousness and felt at peace. I have been in remission for more than a decade. I bear emotional and physical scars. Doctors will monitor me for the rest of my life. But through faith in Christ Jesus I am complete.

**Prince of peace, thank you for granting us peace  
and righteousness and embracing us  
with your love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Patients and their caregivers

**1 Kings 18:41-46; Matthew 16:1-4**





## Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 19

**And after he had dismissed the crowds,  
he went up the mountain by himself  
to pray. (v. 23)**

My great-aunt Doris was wise. Separated by almost two thousand miles, we talked by phone often. After I poured out my troubles to her one day, she said, “The book of Proverbs has thirty-one chapters—enough for one a day for the whole month.” So I began reading a chapter of scripture each evening: in silence or aloud, repeating key verses, reading the footnotes, writing notes in the margins, looking at Bible maps. I found I slept better and woke up more thankful for the day and better prepared to meet life’s challenges. When I allowed life to crowd out my practice, I missed this mindful meditation and craved the peace it brought.

In today’s reading, before Jesus and Peter walked on water amid a storm, Jesus took time away in prayer to nourish and strengthen his soul for what lay ahead. I have found that daily devotions help me navigate the storms of life. No surprise that Jesus and Aunt Doris both knew what was best!

**Son of God, as seasonal storms disrupt our lives,  
help us find peace in the quiet of prayer. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Victims of the ravages of weather

**1 Kings 19:9-18; Psalm 85:8-13; Romans 10:5-15**

## **Riding out life's floods**

**The waters increased, and bore up the ark,  
and it rose high above the earth. (v. 17)**

My radiologist prescribed thirty-two radiation doses to remove my breast cancer. I suffered extreme physical and mental fatigue, loss of appetite, a skin infection, and edema. Once I had an anxiety attack and cried through the entire radiation session. But this traumatic experience increased my chance of survival by forty percent. With the support of God, family, and friends, I have survived more than ten years. Thanks be to God!

Like my cancer treatment, Noah's story was both scary and life-giving. There was no escape—we had to go through it: Noah's family through the flood; me, the radiation. The floodwaters and the radiation both took and gave life. But Noah and his small band were carried safely in the ark, just as I was buoyed by the love and care of friends and family. And as my health improved after the treatments, so Noah and his family began anew with God's help after the flood's devastation.

**God, when life overwhelms us, thank you for the  
“arks” that lift and carry us forward. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Medical radiologists

**Psalm 18:1-19; 2 Peter 2:4-10**

## **Our stronghold of salvation**

**The foundations also of the mountains  
trembled and quaked, because he  
was angry. (v. 7)**

Our infant was asleep in his crib when the 5.6 magnitude earthquake hit. Before we knew what was happening, the windows shook, the dishes rattled, and our one-story house swayed. My husband bolted down the hall to our son's room. Hands shaking, I staggered to an archway and wedged myself in place. By the time I could breathe again, the quake had stopped. It felt like an eternity, but it had lasted just thirty seconds.

In today's psalm God hears David's cry for help and saves him from his enemy, King Saul. David's story paints a dramatic picture of deliverance: God was angry about David's predicament. In response, the earth quaked. Volcanoes erupted, spewing smoke and ash. The sky darkened, the wind blew, and thunder and lightning pierced the sky. David called God his fortress and deliverer. After experiencing earthquakes myself, I appreciate David's awe at God's power and how safe he felt in the refuge of God's care.

**O God, my rock, be my stronghold  
when sin and danger threaten me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: First responders to natural disasters

**Genesis 19:1-29; Romans 9:14-29**

## A time to rest

### **But [Jesus] was asleep. (v. 24)**

Pastor Jackson, or “PJ”—a cool pastor who taught confirmation at my small-town Lutheran school—once told of when his son was out past curfew. While PJ and his wife awaited his return, PJ dozed. His wife wondered how he could sleep at a time like that! He said he was tired and needed to rest. He would wake up and deal with his son when he came home. There was no use worrying about things beyond his control.

Matthew’s story describes a storm swamping the disciples’ boat. The disciples wake Jesus up to save them. Jesus rebukes not only the wind and water but the disciples too, for not having more faith. I see a lesson here about patience, faith, and the uselessness of worry.

To keep anxiety or worry from swamping me when life is beyond my control, I strive to follow Jesus’ lead and take care of myself so I can deal with events as best I can. Though it’s not always easy, I make it my aim to let go of what I cannot manage and put everything in God’s hands.

**Jesus, when storms hit, help me trust you rather than worry about things beyond my control. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Seafarers and fishermen

**Job 36:24-33; 37:14-24; Psalm 18:1-19**

## **Equity and grace**

**You judge the peoples with equity and  
guide the nations upon earth. (v. 4)**

I belong to Lutheran Peace Fellowship, a nonprofit focused on equity—justice and fairness for all. My church has hosted speakers about issues where we felt equity was lacking: access to affordable healthcare, housing, and food; the impact of climate change, especially on the poor; the plight of refugees around the world; and the need for just and fair governance policies.

We opened each gathering by focusing on God's grace for us all. Our goal was to follow the golden rule by treating others as we wanted them to treat us—to listen first, ask questions to learn, and share our experiences respectfully. Only by treating others justly and fairly could we hope to understand complex issues and work for equity. The psalmist calls us to praise God for treating people with care: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity" (v. 4). May God's grace guide us as we, too, advocate for justice and fairness for all.

**God of the nations, inspire us to treat others  
with grace as we work for justice for all. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Nonprofits that provide social services

**Isaiah 45:20-25; Revelation 15:1-4**

## **God's open door**

**[God] had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles. (v. 27)**

In my childhood church was a stained-glass window depicting a heavy wooden door with no outside handle, and Jesus standing there knocking. Many interpret this familiar image as Jesus knocking on the door of people's hearts, hoping they will invite him into their lives as their Savior. But Martin Luther, in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed, taught: "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel . . . and kept me in the true faith" (*ELW*, p. 1162).

When people welcomed Paul and became believers, he said that through the disciples, God "had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles." The Holy Spirit doesn't force faith upon people but opens the door to salvation and invites them in. And here's the clincher: the door handle is on *God's* side, and God has opened the door to *all*.

**Holy Spirit, thank you for calling me by the gospel and keeping me in the true faith. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Hospitality ministries

**Psalm 67; Isaiah 63:15-19**

## **Mary, Mother of Our Lord**

**O magnify the LORD with me, and let us  
exalt his name together. (v. 3)**

Human vulnerability and need, God's recurring deliverance, and people's thanks and praise are among the themes woven through the Hebrew scriptures, including today's reading from Psalm 34. When Mary, commemorated today, hears Gabriel's news that she will bear the Son of God, the words of her Magnificat—her song of praise—echo these themes, woven into her life from childhood.

Where the psalm attributed to David declares, "O magnify the LORD with me," Mary sings, "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46). As the psalmist testifies, "I sought the LORD, and he . . . delivered me" (v. 4), Mary speaks not only for herself but for all the vulnerable: "[The Lord] has . . . lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things" (Luke 1:52-53).

Through Mary's willing participation, God delivers (pun intended) the supreme Deliverance of all time: the one named Son of David, Son of Mary, Son of God. And we give thanks and praise.

**Lord, thank you for Mary, willing participant  
in your act of deliverance and model of  
heartfelt praise. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Song and hymn writers

**Isaiah 61:7-11; Luke 1:46-55; Galatians 4:4-7**



## Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 20

**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs  
that fall from their masters' table. (v. 27)**

Raising teens is hard. Suddenly these once-little boys who loved dump trucks and Pixar movies are taller than my wife and interested in hair products. It seems just yesterday I'd say, "Time to clean your rooms," and they'd race to see who could finish first. Now they gripe and stomp in emotional rebellion.

In this context I was teaching my oldest how to put clothes away so they won't come out wrinkled. I explained; he listened. Then he looked at me with honest eyes and said, "Dad, you know I'm not going to do this. Just let me do it my way. If it's wrinkled, then I have to deal with it." It was wise and true.

When an outsider pled with Jesus for her sick daughter, upon his reply I picture her looking at him with honest eyes and saying, *Lord, even the dogs get some crumbs*. And it seems he was humbled—by an outsider from Cana, no less—and learned something. It is a reminder that we can all listen and learn, even from unexpected sources.

**Give me ears to hear and a heart to learn today,  
loving Jesus. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Parents and teenagers

**Psalm 67; Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**



## Free is free

**Why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke? (v. 10)**

At the church I serve, my work involves welcoming people to the community. Through that process I ask folks what drew them to this church. The most common answer is how we welcome people to communion. Every Sunday the presiding pastor shares that the table is a place of grace. Grace, by definition, is free, and “free” means *free*. If there is anything you have to do to earn your way to the table—anything at all—it is no longer free but a paycheck, earned by being a certain age, taking a class, or meeting some other qualification. We end each and every invitation by saying, “The gifts of God are . . .” and the congregation responds, “Free.”

Funny, isn't it, how difficult “free” is for us? People want to create rules and laws because freedom—grace—is just too crazy an idea! But the disciples understood that it is not the yoke of *doing* that saves us but the grace and love of God through Christ. This is real freedom.

**Jesus, remind me again today  
that it is you who saves. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Prisoners and prison workers

**2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 87**

## **Who is your savior?**

**I, I am the LORD, and besides me  
there is no savior. (v. 11)**

It is the American dream: if you work hard, you can fulfill your desires. People move to the United States from all over the world because of the incredible opportunities in this country. We believe all is possible with enough perseverance. It is no surprise that this ideology can creep into our theology. We believe so much in individual achievement that we begin to think we are the ones who find our way to God. If we work hard enough, we will find real life.

In short, we become our own saviors. In this scenario, Christ doesn't save; we do, by our work, our effort. But you and I know that if it comes down to what we do, we will always fall short. We make lousy saviors. Paul writes over and over that what we do does not save us; only the love of God in Christ Jesus can accomplish that. This is the best news there is.

**Thank you, God, for being the real savior,  
the true author of love and life.**

**In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People in need of the  
good news of God's love

**Psalm 87; Romans 11:13-29**

## **What Jesus looks like**

**Many will come from east and west  
and will eat. (v. 11)**

When we look at pictures of Jesus, we often see our own reflection. In Japan, he looks Japanese. Pictures of Jesus in Africa show him with dark skin and black hair. In Northern European cultures, he is often depicted as fair-haired and blue-eyed with a light complexion. This isn't shameful or wrong, unless we impose our image of Jesus on others. It's natural to view Jesus through our own lenses, but if we take the body of Christ seriously, we recognize Jesus in *all* types of people, for *all* human beings are made in the image of God.

It should be no surprise, then, in our reading today that Jesus sees God at work in a Gentile, this Roman centurion. Jesus recognizes his own and marvels, and then reminds us that the household of God is much bigger than people who look like us or act like us. Rather, many will come from every race, skin color, tribe, orientation, nation, gender, ability, culture—to eat at the great feast in God's banquet hall. Even people who look like me!

**Christ, you welcome all to your feast.**

**Teach me to do the same. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Refugees and asylum seekers

**Psalm 87; Isaiah 66:18-23**

## **A different course of action**

### **Why not rather be wronged? (v. 7)**

What an interesting issue in the church in Corinth! They are suing one another over, well, who knows what. Paul seems to be admonishing them to avoid this, asking whether they would not rather just be wronged and move on. That sounds almost crazy!

I do not believe the lesson here is to allow justice to be undone. Wrongdoers are not to be given permission. But perhaps the call is to have a better way to address issues. Matthew 18:15-17 encourages us to work out our differences one-on-one, then if necessary in a partnership, then in the community of believers.

There are appropriate times to use the laws of the land, but perhaps in our culture we are too quick to head to court. Perhaps we can do more to make things right between brothers and sisters before we take that step. Perhaps we can be more active in helping, forgiving, reconciling, and finding a way together with grace.

**Holy Lord, give me a heart for reconciliation—  
the ministry you have entrusted to us. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Lawyers, judges, and clerks of court

**Psalm 138; Ezekiel 28:11-19**

## **Pride and character**

### **Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. (v. 17)**

At sporting events we often see egos unchecked. Players celebrate touchdowns, home runs, goals, and baskets, then shout their praises to the heavens. I know I would be excited to score the winning goal in the World Cup, but how would I celebrate?

In the 2019 Women's US Tennis Open, we witnessed a rare sight. Veteran champion Naomi Osaka beat fifteen-year-old Coco Gauff. The defeat was not surprising, but how the victor shared the stage with the youngster she had beaten was. When Osaka praised Gauff for her accomplishments and honored her for her hard work, the crowd cheered—not for the athlete's victory but for her character, even in victory.

We can be proud of our hard work, yes, but also humble in the Lord. "For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends" (v. 18). May our legacy be seen in how God uses our accomplishments (and defeats) to build good character within us.

**Remind me, Jesus, to be of good character,  
humbled in you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Athletes, coaches,  
sports staff, and referees

**Psalm 138; Ezekiel 31:15-18**

## Praying twice

**They shall sing of the ways of the LORD,  
for great is the glory of the LORD. (v. 5)**

There is something so wonderful about watching my four-year-old run to me when I pick her up from preschool. One day she was humming a tune I could not follow. As we drove, her beautiful voice rose up singing, "In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified." I could not help the tear that slid down my cheek.

There is a saying that "those who sing pray twice." It's attributed to several ancient teachers, including Augustine, who also wrote about how spiritual music finds a way into our psyche, and how music can engage the deep practice of prayer and connect us with God. Music is a way to praise and lament, to celebrate and grieve.

Sometimes prayer is difficult. If you are not sure what to pray, perhaps find a song that expresses your heart and let it be your prayer. In doing so, you may actually be praying twice!

**Plant a song within me, Jesus, that I may pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Musicians

**Ezekiel 36:33-38; Matthew 16:5-12**



## **Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 21**

### **Who do people say that the Son of Man is? (v. 13)**

I have a heart for young adults. Many have had a difficult experience with church. What should be a place of good news has become for them a place of judgment and pain.

We often find ourselves discussing faith over a cup of coffee. When they ask me, “Do you believe in Jesus?” I often respond, “Which one?” I have to disentangle the Jesus they were taught, the Jesus of anger and judgment, from the one of scripture, a Jesus of kindness and compassion. The Jesus of scripture did not judge people but loved them into a new way of being. Jesus didn’t ask people to follow rules and only then would he love them; he loved them and showed them a new way to be—that is, to be like him.

Who do we say Jesus is? The living God of love. May we be bold in sharing this Jesus.

**Help me share your love, Jesus,  
that others may know you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Therapists, counselors,  
and social workers

**Psalm 138; Isaiah 51:1-6; Romans 12:1-8**

## Bartholomew, Apostle

### Philip said to him, “Come and see.” (v. 46)

I’m seriously jealous. Philip has the most unfair advantage. When Nathanael—elsewhere called Bartholomew, commemorated today—asks, *How do I know? Who is this Messiah?*, Philip can simply say, *Come on, let me show you*, and there Jesus is! Sometimes I wish I could walk someone over to the living, breathing Jesus and introduce them directly.

But we can! The living Christ dwells deep within each one of us. Martin Luther said we are to be “little Christs” in the world. Because we are loved by God and claimed by baptism into Christ, we are also called and sent as his disciples. We are not always Christ-like, but when we fall short, Jesus calls us again, puts his words in our mouth, his love in our heart, his deeds of service into our hands. And we, the church, become Christ’s body. This isn’t just an idea. We are the living, breathing Christ in the world.

“Come and see” is an invitation for others to find the living Jesus in each of us. May it be so.

**Make me, if not a perfect example,  
a living example of you, O Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who haven’t been  
introduced to Jesus

**Exodus 19:1-6; Psalm 12; 1 Corinthians 12:27-31a**



## Full of God

**For from [God] and through [God]  
and to [God] are all things. (v. 36)**

Whoa. What happens if we take this statement seriously? Everything is from God? Everyone? That means even those who look different belong to God—even those who believe differently from me.

How easily we can be offended! I suppose it is part of our evolutionary nature not only to need community but to desire exclusivity. The impulse toward community helped human beings survive over the ages as they surrounded themselves with others like them for protection and provision. Community is in our bones, but so is making community exclusive.

It's not a surprise that this practice folds into our faith identity. We like the idea of being unique and separate, but this verse reminds us that God is *not* exclusive and instead is the source of all and works through all. Not one place or person or thing is apart from God. How might this understanding change how we see the world? How might it affect our interactions with other people?

**O God, help us see you working for good in every person and situation. In Christ we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Peacemakers and ambassadors

**Deuteronomy 32:18-20, 28-39; Psalm 18:1-3, 20-32**

## **Seeing the gift**

**But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “Why this waste?” (v. 8)**

The woman comes and breaks open a jar of expensive perfume. The smell fills the space. She bathes Jesus' head—an anointing. It's a beautiful moment, but it is about to be spoiled. Jesus has received a great and humble offering, but his disciples are appalled. Jesus sees the gift; the disciples see waste.

We are likely more connected to bad news now than any time in history. When communication has global reach and our attention is drawn to scenes of disaster and shouting heads, bad news dominates. But we can see beauty in this world if we put aside our criticism of others. There are gifts to appreciate if we can get past our cynicism. Set down the screen; take a break from the relentless flow of news. Risk delight in God's creation, in a conversation with a neighbor, in life abundant around us. Follow Jesus' example of looking for the good in another's actions and extending gratitude and grace.

**Jesus, Messiah, give me courage  
to risk delight. Amen.**

Prayer concern: The ELCA Good Gifts ministry

**Psalm 18:1-3, 20-32; Isaiah 28:14-22**

## **Risk humility**

### **The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. (v. 14)**

I have a student who believes the earth is flat. Despite every piece of evidence, science, pictures from space, he can't be dissuaded. He only listens to voices, watches videos, or reads articles that feed his point of view. This is called "confirmation bias"—that is, our tendency to be drawn to the ideas that confirm what we want to hear.

In our reading the prophets are saying what the king wants to hear and are rewarded for doing so. In the end they would be wrong, and the kingdom would fall to invading armies. The king was victim to his own confirmation bias. We can easily fall into the same trap.

But we are called to practice humility, to set aside our biases in order to listen to other points of view, to listen to the other side of a matter, to learn and grow. We are called to be careful with the voices we allow into our lives, lest they be prophets lying in God's name, saying only what we want to hear. Risk humility, and hear a new word.

**Lord God, give me courage to risk humility  
so I might learn from others and grow. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Students

**Psalm 26:1-8; Ephesians 5:1-6**

## **Courage, honor, and integrity**

**Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked  
in my integrity. (v. 1)**

I have a ritual for days when I drop my kids off at school. As we get near the place for them to jump out to the curb, I draw the cross on their forehead, saying, "Courage, honor, and integrity." One day, my youngest asked, "What is integrity?" I had only a moment, so I said, "It's being who you is, and not who you ain't"—colloquial words a friend shared with me many years ago. Integrity is about being true to your identity.

It's hard for kiddos to walk in integrity with forces and voices influencing their identity at every corner. My young ones are discovering who they are daily and are also tested daily. It is a wonder any of us survive childhood! Being "who you is" is a tough road for adults too, but it is one we are called to. So remember: we are children of God, first, middle, and last. Walking daily as God's children is how we grow solid and strong in this identity. May we live with such integrity always.

**Remind me who I am today, God: your child.  
And help me live that way. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Guidance counselors and teachers

**Jeremiah 15:1-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12**

## **Healing and service**

**The fever left her, and she got up  
and began to serve. (v. 15)**

I have had the pleasure of traveling with young people and adults to distant places, paying lots of money for the joy of serving. We sleep on floors, work hard on other people's homes, and give our vacation time in order to do it. It's a strange concept: people paying to work. Why?

When Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, she jumps up and begins to serve. She gets it. Through her healing she was served by Jesus. Now she is freed to serve him and others. She becomes a healer—she who was healed.

Service is a gift of dignity and life to those in need of help. It is also a gift to the ones who are serving—the ability to set down the self in order to lift up another. It is a gift of healing to both, a way to connect to the deep truth that we are called to love one another, and that through service, we make this love visible. Are you in need of healing in heart and soul? Serve someone.

**Jesus, make me a servant,  
and therein may I find healing. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who lead youth service trips

**Psalm 26:1-8; Jeremiah 15:10-14**



## **Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 22**

### **You are a stumbling block to me. (v. 23)**

Wait, isn't this the same disciple whom Jesus commended just moments ago as the rock on which the church would be built? And now Jesus calls him Satan and a stumbling block?

Actually, I find hope in this story because in Peter I see each one of us. His faith is what the church will be built on; at the same time, he gets in Jesus' way by resisting even the thought that the Messiah must suffer. Peter is both rock and stumbling block. As Martin Luther would describe all followers of Jesus, Peter is both saint and sinner, flawed and forgiven.

Peter reminds us that we are the church, not because we are perfect disciples with perfect understanding of who Jesus is. Rather, we are the church because the Spirit of Christ calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us (Luther again). And when, prompted by the Spirit, we follow Jesus instead of trying to lead him, he empowers us to be vessels of good news for the world.

**Thank you, Jesus, for taking us as we are,  
but also for sanctifying and forming us into  
your church. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Construction workers and  
commercial fisher-people

**Psalm 26:1-8; Jeremiah 15:15-21; Romans 12:9-21**

## Apple-eyed

### **Guard me as the apple of the eye. (v. 8)**

It's a phrase we understand, an old one used not infrequently in the English language: "You are the apple of my eye." We know it means to be the one who is cherished above all others, but—apple? Eye? What does that even mean?

The oldest uses of this phrase are found in scripture and originally referred to the pupil. The phrase was an anatomical term meaning that the focus of one's eye is on that which is cherished the most. To be the apple of one's eye meant that the pupil was fixed on the one that was the most beloved. The psalmist is asking to be the beloved, to be under the gaze of God, to have all of God's attention. It is a cry we can share when, like the psalmist, we are in great distress. Take heart! God indeed loves God's creation as children, and you—yes, you!—are the apple of God's eye.

**Thank you for loving me with such great love,  
O God. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Opticians and their staff

**2 Samuel 11:2-26; Revelation 3:1-6**

## True confession

**David said to Nathan,  
“I have sinned against the LORD.” (12:13)**

David's move from shepherding sheep to shepherding Israel as king shows God's unfailing discernment. Though David's youth seemed like anything *but* prep school for royal life, God apparently saw leadership potential—and perhaps the seed of a sheep-themed parable David would sorely need later on.

In the piercingly honest exchange between the prophet Nathan and David after David's sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, we see the deep value of confession and absolution. Sometimes upon confessing sin in private prayer, we remain guilt-ridden, wondering if God truly forgives us. Yet as David received God's absolution without delay through Nathan, we too can be assured by a trusted Christian friend or pastor that God waits for us with open arms. If you are troubled by sin, consider confessing it to God before another human being who can speak God's forgiveness aloud to you: “Now the LORD has put away your sin” (v. 13). It can make a big difference.

**Lord, I confess that I too have sinned against you.  
Please forgive me, that I may serve you anew. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those wrestling with guilt

**Psalm 17; Revelation 3:7-13**



## True commitment

**[Jesus said,] “Whoever is not with me  
is against me.” (v. 30)**

True commitment seems rare today. We like to keep our options open, to be free to change our minds about an idea—or even a person. Sometimes we don’t commit to one thing because we want to please everyone, which can erode our convictions bit by bit. We can become quite accomplished fence-straddlers!

Jesus, however, does not mince words when he speaks about commitment: we’re either fully for him, or we’re not. Evil, personified here as Beelzebul or Satan, is not the source of Jesus’ power; anyone who does not work for love and life is, by definition, *against Jesus*, no matter what mask one wears or what words one speaks. The Spirit of God empowers Jesus—and all who work to give life.

Jesus is still recruiting disciples, calling us to commit to him fully. He doesn’t ask for half-heartedness or part-time followers. He calls us to work 24/7 toward life, not death, and toward love, not hate—to be *with* him, not against him, in *all* that we do.

**Jesus, I ask you for the courage to answer your call to discipleship. Help me commit to you fully. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who exemplify  
full commitment to Jesus

**Psalm 17; Jeremiah 17:5-18**

## **The law of love**

**Give me understanding, that I may keep  
your law . . . with my whole heart. (v. 34)**

Law-abiding citizens generally understand what the laws prescribe and have learned to live within their bounds. Voting members of an organization such as a faith community have learned and accepted certain requirements. For instance, in the ELCA, congregational voting members meet the criteria for “active membership.” But minimally keeping the law or meeting organizational requirements is one thing; delighting in doing so actively is another.

“Give me understanding,” the psalmist prays, “that I may keep your law . . . with my whole heart.” No memorizing for the test and then forgetting the material right after! This individual longs to know God’s law “by heart,” to incorporate it into daily life. Why? What kind of ordinances “delight” a person (v. 35)? What policies are we glad to follow?

Ones that give life (vv. 37, 40), that ensure well-being for all. Ones rooted in God’s love.

**Lord God, write your law upon my heart.  
I want to abide in and share your love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Policy makers

**Ezekiel 24:1-14; 2 Corinthians 12:11-21**

## **Beautiful feet**

**As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (v. 15)**

We first find scriptural mention of the “beautiful feet” of “those who bring good news” in Isaiah 52:7. Paul reminds the Roman believers of this image. But reading his words reminds me not of Isaiah’s writings but of my mother’s feet. Not beautiful by any objective standard, her feet had bunions, corns, and calluses—the result of a hard life. She was raised on a farm in a large family; well-fitting shoes were a luxury. Her formal education ended at eighth grade, and she worked as a “cleaning lady.”

But each week she taught Sunday school to three-year-olds in a struggling mission congregation. The children—most from poor, often chaotic homes—loved her. And she embodied the very love of Jesus for them. Through both the lessons she taught and the love she shared, my mother brought the good news of Jesus into the children’s lives. Beautiful feet—and a beautiful heart—indeed!

**God of love, help me to spread your good news in my ordinary life today, in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Teachers of young children

**Psalms 119:33-40; Ezekiel 24:15-27**

## Hearing voices

### The word of the LORD came to me. (v. 1)

We live in a world filled with voices, each clamoring for our full attention, our immediate response, our quick action. *Believe this! Do this! Buy this—now!* It seems that silence is to be avoided at any cost—often even in worship. Constant immersion in the world has become our “new normal.”

By comparison, Ezekiel lived in a quiet world: no television, no cell phones, no traffic sounds. His days were not saturated with noisy distractions. And in that holy silence, the word of the Lord came to him.

God then named Ezekiel a sentinel of the exiled people, instructing him to warn them of approaching danger. If the people heeded these warnings from God, their lives would be saved. If not, they were doomed. Ezekiel was not responsible for their response. His job was only to sound a clear alarm. He understood his prophetic role, and with humility and obedience, he responded to the word of the Lord, first heard in holy silence.

**Dear God, quiet my mind. Speak to my heart.  
Help me to listen and follow your call. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People awaiting a word from God

**Psalm 119:33-40; Matthew 23:29-36**



## **Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 23**

**[Jesus said,] “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (v. 20)**

Jesus challenged many traditional practices and understandings. But he also drew on some long-held traditions of his own Jewish faith. For instance, as he taught the disciples how to deal with conflict, he likely had in mind the Jewish practice of studying Torah in groups of two or three. Just as the Holy One was known to be present in such groups, Jesus promised to be with his followers where even just two or three gathered in his name. And because conflicts are inevitable between people—even disciples of Jesus, even members of the church—he taught a deliberate process for reconciliation, employing respect, discretion, candor, accountability, forgiveness, and love.

The Roman world needed the early church’s model of peaceful conflict resolution. This is still one of the church’s tasks: to show the world how conflicts can be met and managed with respect and love. To do this, we cling to the assurance that Jesus, the Holy One, is always in our midst.

**Jesus, help me feel your presence and follow your directions to resolve conflicts. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who work in conflict resolution

**Psalm 119:33-40; Ezekiel 33:7-11; Romans 13:8-14**

## **Living free**

**As servants of God, live as free people,  
yet do not use your freedom  
as a pretext for evil. (v. 16)**

Every week, after the prayer of confession, a beloved pastor declared words of absolution to the congregation: that we were “free persons with an open future,” sent forth to live our ordinary lives with “boldness and hope.” This was not a license to do whatever we wanted. Rather, it nurtured our trust in God’s complete understanding, promised forgiveness, and steadfast love.

The first epistle attributed to Peter, written centuries ago, still encourages believers to live as God’s witnesses in the world, freed to act both boldly and lovingly. The grace of God liberates us from sinful selfishness to serve God and other people. We can live with boldness and hope, trusting in Christ Jesus, the one true way of life. And when we stray again from his path—as we inevitably will—he will be there to guide us back in grace and love.

**Gracious Lord, thank you for calling and freeing me  
to serve you and all others in your holy name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People elected to public office

**Leviticus 4:27-31; 5:14-16; Psalm 119:65-72**

## Holy ground

**Before I was humbled I went astray,  
but now I keep your word. (v. 67)**

The Latin root word *humus* refers to “ground,” so *humbled* can be understood as being brought back “down to earth” after thinking ourselves superior to others or even God. We like to take charge of our destiny, use our free will to do as we please. Yet quickly we become overwhelmed and lost. God created humanity “from the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7), so being humbled brings us back to the truth of our origins: we are creatures, not the creator. Psalm 119 articulates that we are not God, but we are cared for by a loving God who sets “good judgment and knowledge” (v. 66), “precepts” (v. 69), and “statutes” (v. 71) in place to guide and protect us. Sometimes it takes challenging circumstances to remind us of this, and we, like the psalmist, are humbled.

But *humbled* does not mean “humiliated.” God does not shame us but counts us precious. God breathed into the first human being the very breath of God: we may be created from the “ground,” but we are “holy ground.”

**God, I am humbled by your care for humanity and  
the goodness of your law, guiding us in love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Individuals feeling lost and alone

**Deuteronomy 17:2-13; Romans 13:1-7**

## **The power of prayer**

**[Jesus said,] “Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.” (v. 22)**

This account of Jesus cursing the fig tree seems totally out of character. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus uses his power to benefit, not to destroy. So what’s going on here? Some scholars say the fig tree, for Jesus, symbolized the temple leadership. Both were intended to nourish, to comfort, and to bring peace to God’s people. Both had failed.

In the unexpected ending of this story, Jesus says that his power to make the fig tree wither is nothing compared to the power of prayer. His far-fetched example of asking for a mountain to be moved invites us to pray even for what, to us, seems impossible. Our prayer requests can include healing for those who are ill, hope for those in despair, peace in our world, and more.

**Jesus, I ask for your help to live a fruitful life, and to be faithful—and even bold—in prayer. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Tenders of fruit-tree orchards

**Leviticus 16:1-5, 20-28; Psalm 119:65-72**



## **Living in love**

**We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. (v. 14)**

On this day in 1960, my husband and I promised before God to love one another for the rest of our lives. In youthful innocence we thought we knew what that meant! Now no longer young and starry-eyed, we know our love is nothing short of a gracious gift of God. It has seen us through disappointments, adversities, serious illnesses, and natural aging. Living in this God-given love, we breathe in new life daily.

The unknown author of 1 John seems rooted in the rich Gospel of John. As the familiar John 3:16 declares that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,” the first letter of John proclaims that Jesus the Son “laid down his life for us,” so “we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (v. 16). Our love is to extend beyond family and friends to all God’s diverse children. Living always in Christ’s unconditional, compassionate love brings new life to each day—for receivers and givers of such love.

**Loving God, enable me to live in and through your boundless love today, through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those celebrating  
wedding anniversaries

**Genesis 37:12-36; Psalm 103:1-13**

## **Anger management**

**The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding  
in steadfast love. (v. 8)**

Nineteen years ago today I was enjoying a walk on a picture-perfect September morning—until I got home and my friend called. “Turn on your TV! Something awful is happening!” If you were alive and old enough on 9/11, you likely recall exactly where you were and how you felt. Was anger among your emotions?

Many followers of Christ gathered to pray and look to God’s word for comfort and guidance. The psalmist says God is “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” But sometimes anger is appropriate, like when people cause violence against others or treat the vulnerable unjustly. Even Jesus acted in anger on occasion, such as when moneychangers took advantage of pilgrims at the temple.

Anger is a natural human emotion that can be mis-handled or can serve as a catalyst for positive change. After 9/11, both occurred. Our challenge in all of life is to handle anger in healthy ways, following God in letting love and mercy lead.

**Merciful Lord, may we look to you for guidance  
in dealing with anger. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Anger-management instructors

**Genesis 41:53–42:17; Acts 7:9-16**

## **Lord, teach us to pray**

### **[Jesus said,] “Pray then in this way.” (v. 9)**

The Lord’s Prayer is so familiar we sometimes miss the details of Jesus’ teaching. First, he states that our prayers need not be long—the point isn’t to “heap up empty phrases” (v. 7)—and he gives us a short model prayer.

We pray not from self-focus but as members of the human community: we say “Our Father,” not “My Father.” We honor God whose very name is holy, whose kingdom is not just in a far-off heaven but takes form on earth among us. God’s will is done and our needs are met by God, but God does so *through us*: we are called to share food and other necessities so no one goes without. The forgiveness we exchange with others is empowered by God and, based on Jesus’ explanation after the prayer, is crucial to our relationship with God.

Finally, we close by asking God to save us from trials and temptations. It is less a request than a reminder to ourselves that God does indeed do so—for which we give thanks and praise.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done . . . Amen.**

Prayer concern: All who work to supply  
daily bread for others

**Genesis 45:1-20; Psalm 103:1-13**



## Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 24

**Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? (v. 21)**

As often happens, Peter serves here as spokesperson for all the disciples. With his question about forgiveness, he even supplies a ready-made response that he apparently thinks quite generous: *How about seven times?* While rabbinical rules said one should forgive three times, Peter more than doubles that!

But Jesus basically says, *Don't keep score, Peter. After all, think how often God has forgiven you! And if you want to live in communion with God, you too must forgive without limit.*

Jesus knew that revenge had cast very long shadows over millennia of human history. Seeking revenge or wallowing in resentment over past hurts does not heal a relationship; neither does it make life better for the one who was hurt. Jesus brings God's light to dispel the shadows of insult and injury. Jesus reveals God's grace personally—in his very *person*—and teaches us how to live out God's loving forgiveness. The first step we and Peter learn is: *No counting!*

**Light of the world, shine in and through me today.**

**Enable me to forgive, through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People carrying grudges

**Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103:1-13; Romans 14:1-12**

## Holy Cross Day

**. . . Christ the power of God and  
the wisdom of God. (v. 24)**

God is not revealed in spectacular signs or intellectual wisdom. While signs and wisdom—the star of Bethlehem, Jesus’ healings, even poetry and philosophy—sometimes point to God, we know God best in Jesus, who was fully human, even enduring pain and death.

We don’t worship the cross itself. It was the Roman state’s chosen means of execution, so the powers-that-be used it to try to destroy the Power they felt threatened by. That Power is what—whom—we worship. In God’s self-giving (which happened to take place on a cross) we learn the way of love. In the Savior willing to suffer with us, we find a God of compassion, not punishment. And in Jesus’ resurrection we meet the God who says, *The crosses—sufferings, injustices—of this world are real but are not the final word. I will face them with you and bring you through them—into endless life.*

As foolish as it seems, Jesus calls us to walk the same path of love with others, and the Spirit helps us do so.

**Crucified Lord, your loving sacrifice gives me  
life forever, by grace. Help me share your love  
with others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who struggle daily  
with believing

**Numbers 21:4b-9; Psalm 98:1-4; John 3:13-17**

## **Blessings of unity**

**How very good and pleasant it is  
when kindred live together in unity! (v. 1)**

All families experience disagreement. How that inevitable fact of life is handled makes all the difference. Healthy families enable individuals to express differing thoughts and feelings. Spirited discussions may follow, but in the end, unity—which doesn't require uniformity—prevails.

This holds true for nuclear families, extended families, chosen families, and church families. When life together exudes unity, "how very good and pleasant it is." Not only are members not continuously quarreling, but they share deep concern for the welfare of all and direct their united energies toward serving the world.

As people of God, while we may not always be of one mind, we are to be of one heart. In the heart of our creator, we are truly "kindred." We are meant to be united in the mission of Christ and his kingdom—or "kin-dom," as some people now say to emphasize the kinship among us. May our unity as the family of God bless the world with God's love.

**God of unity, send your Spirit to move  
in our anxious hearts today.**

**Unite us in Christ's love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Broken and estranged families

**Genesis 49:29–50:14; Romans 14:13–15:2**

## **Figs and forgiveness**

**Whenever you stand praying, forgive . . .  
so that your Father in heaven may also  
forgive you. (v. 25)**

In Mark 11:12-14 Jesus walks by a fig tree, hoping to find figs to satisfy his hunger. The tree has no figs because it is the wrong season. Still, Jesus curses the tree for its lack of fruit. In today's reading Jesus and his disciples come upon this same tree the next morning and find it withered. Jesus suggests that a tree without fruit and a prayer without forgiveness cannot fulfill their intended purpose.

I wonder sometimes about my prayers and what effect they have. No mountains, literal or figurative, seem to move when I pray.

Yet I do know this: when I'm holding a grudge in my heart or feel angry about what someone has done, I have trouble sensing God's presence and love. Forgiveness of others and a trusting relationship with God go hand-in-hand. And when they do, the possibilities of prayer are endless and its power vast.

**Forgiving God, help me forgive others just as  
you forgive me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People who engage in prayer  
as a ministry

**Genesis 50:22-26; Psalm 133**

## **Troubled times**

**Look! On the mountains the feet of  
one who brings good tidings,  
who proclaims peace! (v. 15)**

Each day the news is filled with accounts of events happening around the world. Much of that news reflects the turmoil and pain of people struggling with poverty, injustice, extremism, and political unrest. In some ways the prophet Nahum's world was just the same. It was a world of uncertainty, with people caught between warring empires or suffering at the whims of self-serving rulers.

But in the march of history and the clash of nations and peoples, Nahum sounds another note. He promises, on God's behalf, good news of peace and restoration for God's people.

Our lives are full of uncertainty and pain. At times it is a result of our own choices; at times it is simply the consequence of living in a broken world. Our God has not forgotten us. God's ancient promises are as real as today's headlines. We can live in hope.

**Have mercy, O God, on us and all people.  
Help us hear your good news. In Jesus' name  
we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those caught in violent conflicts around  
the world

**Psalm 145:1-8; 2 Corinthians 13:1-4**



## **An important test**

### **Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. (v. 5)**

Some years ago, but well into adulthood, I was invited by my high school tennis partner to play in a doubles tournament. Although neither of us had played tennis competitively for many years, I agreed, thinking that with a little practice we would do okay. I was wrong!

In our very first match we lost 6–0, 6–1 (and I think the one game we won was because the other team felt sorry for us). Failing to be honest and realistic about our tennis abilities led us to an embarrassing defeat.

Paul challenges us to be honest about our lives and our faith. Are we out of practice? How long has it been since we wrestled with Jesus' teachings? When did we last give ourselves away for another in need? What evidence is there that our faith affects our perspective? Our behavior? Our spending habits? Our prayer life? Do we—and does the world—“realize that Jesus Christ is in [us]?” (v. 5).

**Gracious Lord, keep us honest. Remind us that our faith depends finally on you. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: High school athletes

**Psalm 145:1-8; Nahum 2:3-13**

## **Not a little, not a lot, but “abounding”**

**The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (v. 8)**

One of our first arguments as a married couple was over peanut butter. “Creamy is cheaper,” my wife argued—you can spread it thinner so it will last longer. “But I like chunky” was my weak reply. Frugality won. For years my peanut butter sandwiches weren’t satisfying.

Our income grew, and one day we started buying both creamy and chunky peanut butter. I spread chunky peanut butter thickly on a piece of bread, savoring each crunchy bite. Now we had peanut butter in abundance.

For the first seven verses of Psalm 145 the psalmist sings a paean of praise to God’s greatness. But in verse 8 we hear the greatest thing of all—“The LORD is gracious and merciful . . . and abounding in steadfast love.” The word “abounding” captures the wonderful plentitude of God’s love for us. No need to spread this love thin; there is more than we can imagine—enough and more than enough for every hungry heart.

**Lord of love, we come to you with hopeful and hungry hearts. Fill us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Newly married couples

**Zephaniah 2:13-15; Matthew 19:23-30**



## Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 25

**So the last will be first,  
and the first will be last. (v. 16)**

Jesus begins with the familiar phrase “For the kingdom of heaven is like . . .” (v. 1). It alerts us to the fact that we are about to learn something about God’s perspective.

Although we only hear from the laborers who worked the entire day, we can imagine that the others who were hired earlier were also more or less indignant—feeling a sense of unfairness about the situation.

Jesus doesn’t address the issue of fairness—at least not from the perspective of the workers. He comes at it from the landowner’s perspective—which is also unusual. This landowner is a spendthrift, not carefully paying the least amount possible but giving to each laborer a full day’s wage.

God is not fair; God is gracious. Those who were hired first were *given* a job—that’s grace. Those who were hired later in the day were *given* a full day’s wage—that’s grace. That the last will be first and the first will be last overturns our sense of fairness—that’s grace.

**Remind us, God, that we are all indebted  
to your grace. Teach us to be gracious.  
In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who are unhappy in their work

**Psalm 145:1-8; Jonah 3:10–4:11; Philippians 1:21-30**

## **Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist**

**[Jesus said,] “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (v. 13)**

Jesus often gets into trouble with religious leaders. Their expectation of him, a rabbi of increasing renown, is that he exemplify their understanding of the Jewish faith. One tenet of their understanding of the faith was that you avoid people outside the community of faith and of low moral repute. The shorthand for those people is “tax collectors and sinners.”

Jesus confounds the religious leaders not only by welcoming “tax collectors and sinners” but by accepting them as worthy of being inside—not outside—the community of faith. Indeed, today we remember Matthew, a tax collector changed by Jesus’ love into an apostle and an evangelist.

What the religious leaders couldn’t accept about Jesus turns out to be good news for all of us: for we know deep down inside that no matter what the public opinion is about us, we are part of the “tax collector and sinner” crowd in need of Jesus’ welcome, forgiveness, and love.

**Jesus, thanks for the example of Matthew:  
welcomed by you, he shared your welcome  
with others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those wounded by the church

**Psalm 119:33-40; Ezekiel 2:8–3:11;  
Ephesians 2:4-10**

## **Not a ladder but a cross**

**Then Jacob . . . said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” (v. 16)**

The Sunday school song “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder” comes from this passage. While the song suggests that Jacob’s dream ladder enables us to climb up to heaven, this text tells us that angels were “ascending and descending” this ladder. Jacob’s dream makes it clear that God came down to him, not that he had to climb up to God.

God makes a number of promises to Jacob, including “I am with you and will keep you wherever you go” (v. 15). Jacob’s dream is the proof he needs to believe that God is as good as God’s word. Jacob exclaims, “How awesome is this place!” (v. 17).

God still comes to each of us in a host of ways: some as obvious as a dream; many so subtle that we miss them. God may not promise that our “offspring shall be like the dust of the earth” (v. 14), but God does promise to be with us and keep us wherever we go. And God’s guarantee for that promise is marked and sealed—not with a ladder but with an old rugged cross.

**Great God of heaven and earth, steady and strengthen us for the challenges of this day. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Sunday school music leaders

**Psalm 106:1-12; Romans 16:17-20**

## **God holds on tight**

**For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand;  
it is I who say to you, "Do not fear,  
I will help you." (v. 13)**

When my daughter Kristen was three, our family visited the ocean. Although the warm sand felt good beneath her feet, Kristen, curious and cautious, watched the crashing waves and rushing surf from a distance. She wouldn't go near the water until I took her hand. I held on to her tightly as we waded in together. Feeling my strength and hearing my reassurance, she found enough courage to walk into the tumbling surf, to stand in the tidal currents, to feel as well as hear the thunderous crash of the waves.

God promises through the prophet Isaiah that God will hold on to us in the midst of uncertain times and the fears that crowd in around us. Knowing that God is with us offers us enough strength and reassurance to face whatever the day might bring.

**God who holds on to us, may your promise grow more real to us each day. In Christ we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those living in fear

**Psalm 106:1-12; Matthew 18:1-5**

## **The blame game**

**Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD,  
and of your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old. (v. 6)**

Driving to work one day, I was cut off by a man in a hurry. I braked hard and, annoyed, honked my horn, muttering an unkind thought about him: "What a jerk." The next day as I drove home, I hurried to turn left before the light turned red. A driver coming toward me had to brake hard to avoid hitting me and blasted his horn at me. I could imagine what he was muttering!

The psalmist begins by contrasting himself with his enemies: He waits for and trusts God. In contrast, his enemies are "wantonly treacherous" (v. 3). Very soon, however, as he looks at himself, the psalmist recognizes that not only does he himself need to be taught God's truths, but he needs God's mercy and steadfast love.

How often I have muttered about another's behavior, only to quickly realize that I was the one in need of God's grace, forgiveness, and love. Often we are more like those we disparage than we imagine.

**O God, for the sake of Jesus,  
be merciful to me, a sinner. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Drivers on the road today

**Ezekiel 12:17-28; James 4:11-16**

## **A chip off the old block?**

**He shall surely live, says the Lord GOD. (v. 9)**

My receding hairline is a genetic gift from my family. The way I laugh comes from my mom. Our parents deeply influence our lives, but we make our own choices. In these verses Ezekiel reminds us that our choices, not those of our parents, are what God is concerned about.

Ezekiel describes God's perspective on righteousness: it has to do both with avoiding wrong behavior, like adultery and robbery, and with engaging in right behavior: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked.

Although these verses from Ezekiel suggest we are either in one camp or the other—righteous or sinner—most of us know we are a mix of good and bad, love and indifference, compassion and selfishness. So, what are we to make of Ezekiel's list?

It describes aspirational behaviors. It also helps make real for us just how often we fall short of those aspirations. Ultimately, then, it both motivates us to action and moves us to cry out for mercy.

**Spirit of God, help me live my life daily in tune  
with your call. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People making moral decisions today

**Psalm 25:1-9; Acts 13:32-41**



## **A guilty pleasure**

**Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? (v. 23)**

A coworker seemed to take delight in contradicting others and exposing flaws in their plans and projects. I found myself increasingly frustrated and annoyed when I was around him. Imagining him being shown up, proved wrong, and finally silenced was a guilty pleasure of mine.

Feeling a smug satisfaction when people get their just deserts is, oh, so human. God's perspective, however, is different. In these verses Ezekiel describes God as just—people must live with the consequences of their actions—but also as merciful, calling us to turn, to repent, to live.

An accounting will take place. We reap what we sow. But God is not content with this situation, abandoning us to the suffering we cause ourselves. Rather, God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel, arguing with God's people, calling them to live in righteousness and compassion and so to experience life.

**Gracious God, inspire us to live  
with the compassion and generosity of our  
Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those suffering from regret

**Psalm 25:1-9; Mark 11:27-33**



## **Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 26**

**John came to you in the way of righteousness and . . . you did not change your minds. (v. 32)**

I hold on to a number of cherished beliefs about the type of car I drive, the news shows I watch, the church I attend, the politicians I support. Although I have a rationale for believing as I do, I notice that I tend to discount information that doesn't support my beliefs. As Jesus comes closer to the end of his ministry and life, he challenges the cherished beliefs of the religious establishment.

John the Baptist had become a flashpoint between the religious leaders and some of the Jewish people. The religious leaders were forever suspicious of anyone outside their ranks. But John's authenticity and passion—not to mention his odd behavior—struck a chord with many, and the crowds flocked to him.

Jesus uses this divided opinion about John to tell a parable and teach a lesson. His parable of the two sons reminds us that it is not so much what we say that counts but what we believe and how we act as a result.

**Jesus, help me let go of beliefs that keep me from living out your will. In your name I pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: For people to act with justice, compassion, and love

**Psalm 25:1-9; Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32;  
Philippians 2:1-13**

## **Solid rock**

**To you, O LORD, I call; my rock,  
do not refuse to hear me. (v. 1)**

I clambered down the narrow stairs along the rugged shoreline of Lake Superior. The wind was gusting, and great waves rolled and broke along the shoreline. As I stood upon a great granite boulder, I could see and hear the power of the waves and wind. I felt at once vulnerable and secure.

The psalmist is in a similar predicament. The wicked, “who speak peace with their neighbors, while mischief is in their hearts” (v. 3), make the psalmist feel vulnerable. To say one thing and do another is not only hypocrisy, but in this situation—a community in which people depend on each other for their very lives—it is also a violation of the sacred laws of kinship.

When one cannot trust those with whom one is most connected, trusting in God becomes all the more essential. “The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts” (v. 7): this is rock-solid security for all whose relationships falter, whose support groups disappoint.

**Mighty God, center me upon the great foundation  
of your unfailing love. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those in need of courage and hope

**Judges 14:1-20; Philippians 1:3-14**

## **Michael and All Angels**

**Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. (v. 1)**

Our grandkids have learned the Johnny Appleseed prayer, and whenever our family is together for a meal, one of them always requests it. We hold hands and sing with gusto: "Oh, the Lord is good to me, and so I thank the Lord . . . !" This simple song calls us to gratitude and grounds us in grace.

The psalmist provides a litany of profound reasons for us to "bless the LORD": God forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, satisfies, renews. To consider for even a moment what God has done for us is to be driven to our knees in gratitude and praise. But the angels, the "mighty ones who do [God's] bidding" (v. 20), are simply told to "bless the LORD" without a similar rationale. Perhaps to do God's bidding, to live in obedience to God's will, is all the rationale one needs.

Today is the lesser church festival called Michael and All Angels. As we remember these mighty servants of God, we join with them to "bless the LORD."

**Lord of all, how vast is your mercy, how great your love. Inspire me to bless your holy name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: For congregations to have  
a sense of gratitude

**Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3; Luke 10:17-20;  
Revelation 12:7-12**

## The plot thickens

**When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” (v. 2)**

The best stories, I think, have at least a few surprises. The narrative proceeds in a predictable way until, suddenly, there's a twist and the plot thickens.

The first twist in today's story of the paralytic and his friends is that Jesus saw his *friends'* faith and responded by forgiving the paralytic his sins. The second twist is that when Jesus perceived the scribes' doubts about his authority to forgive the paralytic's sins, he healed the paralytic, who then stood up and headed home. The paralytic was transformed as a result of the faith *and* the doubts of the people around him.

At some point in our lives, we are all paralyzed by grief, broken by sin, or in desperate need of healing physically, emotionally, or spiritually. The intervention of those around us—on our behalf or even with mixed motives—can help us become aware of the life-changing forgiveness, love, and grace of God through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Lord of surprises, forgive and heal me.**

**Then, forgiven and healed,  
may I carry others to you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Caregivers

**Judges 16:23-31; Psalm 28**

## A note to our readers

*Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings* (Consultation on Common Texts, 2005) is the basis for scripture texts for *Christ in Our Home* devotions. In this lectionary the texts for Thursday through Saturday prepare for the Sunday readings while the texts for Monday through Wednesday reflect upon those readings.

Sunday's psalm is often the focus of a devotion for Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. Sunday devotions feature the gospel text, and the readings listed at the end of a Sunday devotion are the psalm and first and second readings for worship (in churches following the Revised Common Lectionary). Scripture texts for devotions on other days of the week include passages with similar themes or helpful background for the Sunday readings, and passages from the same or similar books of the Bible.

Using *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings* for the entire week provides several scripture passages to choose from each day, allowing us flexibility to select focus texts for brief, one-page devotions that will be relevant and inspiring for you.

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Christ in Our Home

## Bringing you a daily message of God's amazing grace

Thank you to the *Christ in Our Home* readers who recently contacted us with feedback. This has resulted in changes that you'll see in this issue:

- larger type size in the regular edition for the daily devotion date and scripture text
- a redesign of the writers' page

Two new features were introduced at the beginning of this year:

- Prayers on the inside front cover: The writer first looks at the church year and upcoming Sunday scripture readings, then crafts these morning, evening, and mealtime prayers specifically for *Christ in Our Home*.
- Additional scripture readings (listed at the end of each devotion): These optional readings are from *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings*.

See page 96 for details on scripture texts selected for the daily devotions.

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### Prayers

#### Morning

Your death and resurrection are my strength and life, O Christ, raising me from fear into the joy of knowing that you are always near. May streams of peace and grace flow through my heart to all I touch this day.  
Amen.

#### Evening

Only in you