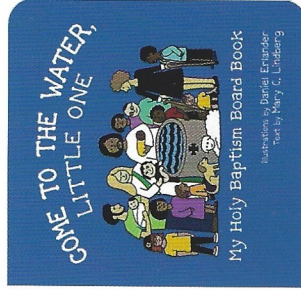


Come to the Water, Little One

My Holy Baptism Board Book

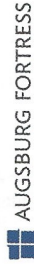


This colorful and inviting board book introduces young children to Holy Baptism with its welcoming invitation: Come to the Water! Using simplified images from *Let the Children Come* and *Water Washed and Spirit Born*, this book gives families a way to read and talk about the special bath called baptism. Daniel Erlander's illustrations are accompanied by a simple rhyming story created by Pastor Mary C. Lindberg.



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Christ in Our Home

April, May, June
2021



April, May, June 2021

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

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Prayers

Morning

Your boundless love rises fresh with each new dawn, O Lord. Speak peace to our hearts as you spoke to the disciples. Enfold us in your love and fill us with your joy, that we may share your healing grace with every soul we meet. Amen.

Evening

Thank you for this day, O God, for every grace we have seen and shared, every kind word and smile of friendship, every moment of laughter, and even for the struggles that humble us and move us to you. Grant us gentle rest until morning dawns. Amen.

Mealtime

You shared the fullness of your heart as you blessed bread and gave it to your friends, Lord Jesus. Fill our hearts with the grace of loving gratitude as we bless each other and share these gifts of your providing. Amen.

Festivals and commemorations

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

Apr. 4	Benedict the African, confessor, 1589
Apr. 6	Albrecht Dürer, 1528; Matthias Grünewald, 1529; Lucas Cranach, 1553; artists
Apr. 9	Dietrich Bonhoeffer, theologian, 1945
Apr. 10	Mikael Agricola, Bishop of Turku, 1557
Apr. 19	Olavus Petri, priest, 1552; Laurentius Petri, Bishop of Uppsala, 1573; renewers of the church
Apr. 21	Anselm, Bishop of Canterbury, 1109
Apr. 23	Toyohiko Kagawa, renewer of society, 1960
Apr. 25	Mark, Evangelist
Apr. 29	Catherine of Siena, theologian, 1380
May 1	Philip and James, Apostles
May 2	Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, 373
May 4	Monica, mother of Augustine, 387
May 8	Julian of Norwich, renewer of the church, c. 1416
May 9	Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, renewer of the church, hymnwriter, 1760
May 14	Matthias, Apostle
May 18	Erik, King of Sweden, martyr, 1160
May 21	Helena, mother of Constantine, c. 330
May 24	Nicolaus Copernicus, 1543; Leonhard Euler, 1783; scientists
May 27	John Calvin, renewer of the church, 1564
May 29	Jiří Tranovský, hymnwriter, 1637
May 31	Visit of Mary to Elizabeth
Jun. 1	Justin, martyr at Rome, c. 165
Jun. 3	The Martyrs of Uganda, 1886; John XXIII, Bishop of Rome, 1963
Jun. 5	Boniface, Bishop of Mainz, missionary to Germany, martyr, 754
Jun. 7	Seattle, chief of the Duwamish Confederacy, 1866
Jun. 9	Columba, 597; Aidan, 651; Bede, 735; renewers of the church
Jun. 11	Barnabas, Apostle
Jun. 14	Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea, 379; Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, c. 385; Gregory of Nazianzus, Bishop of Constantinople, c. 389; Macrina, teacher, c. 379
Jun. 17	Emanuel Nine, martyrs, 2015
Jun. 21	Onesimos Nesib, translator, evangelist, 1931
Jun. 24	John the Baptist
Jun. 25	Presentation of the Augsburg Confession, 1530; Philipp Melancthon, renewer of the church, 1560
Jun. 27	Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, 444
Jun. 28	Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, c. 202
Jun. 29	Peter and Paul, Apostles

About the writers

Prayers (inside front cover) David L. Miller is pastor of faith formation at St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Naperville, Illinois. Previously he served as editor of *The Lutheran* magazine (now *Living Lutheran*) and as director of spiritual formation at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. He and his wife, Dixie, live in Woodridge, Illinois.

April 1–15 Derrick Fallon is an ELCA pastor currently serving St. Michael's Lutheran Church in New Canaan, Connecticut, where he lives with his wife, Pam. He enjoys writing, reading, running, and visiting with his adult children.

April 16–30 Mary Simonson Clark began her professional career as an occupational therapist and later received dual graduate degrees in theology and social work community practice, which she uses as a social work adjunct professor and field instructor with Augsburg University, Minneapolis. She and her husband attend Immanuel Lutheran Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

May 1–15 Gary Westgard is a retired ELCA pastor living in Yankton, South Dakota. He is married to Vivian. They have two children and two grandsons. Gary served congregations in Laurel, Nebraska, and at Gayville/Meckling, Vermillion, and Watertown, South Dakota. He enjoys walking with Vivian, reading, writing, watching movies, and taking a nap after lunch.

May 16–31 Susie Gamelin is a wife, mom, and grandma, as well as a retired pastor who is part of Abiding Hope Church in Littleton, Colorado. She understands that she is called to wash the weary feet of people who are suffering.

June 1–15 Rebecca Ninke serves Brooklyn Lutheran and Luther Memorial Churches in the Madison, Wisconsin, area, where she lives with her family. A freelance writer and editor, Rebecca cowrote the children's book *There's No Wrong Way to Pray* with her daughter.

June 16–30 Sue Edison-Swift is a semi-retired faith-based communicator. A member of First Lutheran Church, she lives in Decorah, Iowa, with her husband, Paul Edison-Swift, and Sam-the-Dog.

Maundy Thursday

Having loved his own who were in the world,
he loved them to the end. (v. 1)

His name was Gabriel, and he arrived in the morning.

A few years ago, my son Colin was in a bad car accident. It was a dark day for us, and an even darker night. Weeping and worrying spent the evening in that hospital room. Like guests unwilling to leave, they lingered as my wife, Pam, and I kept watch over and prayed for our broken boy. But through the long night, God was with us too, near to us in our suffering—keeping watch with us as we wept, worried, and prayed.

Gabriel arrived in the morning. He was an angel of a nurse who loved our son. To this day, Gabriel still helps me understand what the footwashing in today's reading is all about. He loved a complete stranger completely. He served with compassion. As the dark nights passed, I experienced the healing presence of Christ morning after morning in the love given to Colin by surgeons, therapists, and angel-nurses. Gabriel helped me see and experience what God's complete love is like, and what it means to love to the end.

Jesus our healer, thank you for loving us who are
in the world, and for loving us completely. Amen.

Prayer concern: Nurses

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Good Friday

Now there was a garden in the place
where he was crucified. (19:41)

Even in the shadow of death there is life. Among the rubble of despair, something grows where we least expect it. Holy Week began with acclamation, joy, and affirmation. Shouts of "Hosanna!" accompanied raised palm branches. Then suddenly everything changed. Hope for the future turned to bewilderment. Joy yielded to fear, anger, and hatred. There was betrayal, denial, abandonment. By Friday, what once was so promising all seemed to be over. The palm branches once raised heavenward were now discarded, forgotten, left to wither away, while *Jesus'* palms were outstretched, open to the world, on a cross.

As people of faith, we know it's not all over on Good Friday. Death is not how *Jesus'* story ends. Easter is coming, with resurrection and new life. On this Good Friday, pause and reflect on how you see signs of life in death's shadows and find hope amid despair. There is a garden. And something is growing where you least expect it.

Faithful God, thank you for sights and sounds of life
reminding me of your life-giving presence. Amen.

Prayer concern: Farmers, gardeners, and landscapers

Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Hebrews 10:16-25

Vigil of Easter

... so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead ...
we too might walk in newness of life. (v. 4)

Today is an in-between day. Something unthinkable has happened; something beautiful will happen. And in this time in between, we wait, watch, witness. The pain of loss lingers. Yet in our grief are signs of healing and newness of life as we walk together in faith.

As I walk today, the morning sun has broken through dark clouds. It is a resurrection dawn. The flowers that have come back to life share their perfumed fragrance. The birds testify and share their morning songs. Newness of life is all around me.

What will *your* signs be today? As you walk, what do you notice that reminds you of the promise of Easter? How does that give you hope, and how will you share it with others? For on this in-between day, somewhere down the road a stone is about to be rolled away, a tomb is about to be emptied. Flowers are pressing up through concrete where they have no business growing. New steps wait to be taken, and new stories are in store—ready to be told.

**God of new life, walk with me and remind me
of your promises today, through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Storytellers

Daniel 3:1-29; John 20:1-18



Easter Day

Do not be alarmed. ... He has been raised. (v. 6)

As I write, the world is in the throes of COVID-19. There is much uncertainty, anxiety, and fear locally and globally. Yet no matter what has happened or is happening, Christ has been raised! There is more to the story than meets the eye.

There is an empty tomb—death could not hold him. There are words of hope, a promise of resurrection, certain new life. The story continues, and *you* have a part in the new beginning. God is still writing this wonderful story, and a message of hope that was first shared so long ago continues with *you* today as you worship our risen Lord, tell the story in your own words, share love with those around you, and speak words of Easter hope. No matter what has happened or is happening within the grasp of illness, isolation, loss, death, and grief, Jesus has risen! Do not be alarmed. There is joy amid fear and life from death. The promise of this day is that Jesus' resurrection is *our* resurrection, as he walks with us in God's ongoing story.

**God of new beginnings, thank you for writing me into
your story of love and life, through our risen Lord. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those grieving the loss of loved ones

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Easter Monday

**Tell my brothers to go to Galilee;
there they will see me. (v. 10)**

Amid all the surprise and fear, joy and wonderment, words of encouragement, hope, and life are spoken. God is not finished. This story is still moving us forward.

Galilee is where it all began—the genesis of Jesus' ministry and mission. And Galilee is where it will all begin again. Jesus will meet his followers there, bless them, and commission them to carry on with his work. God's work of healing, restoration, and renewal will continue—through them.

Jesus also meets *us* and blesses *us* to continue his work. So we also go, trusting in God's faithfulness and believing we are part of this new beginning. And we tell the good news, speaking words of love, of life, and of hope, because God is still breathing new life. There is more to do, for the story continues and God has invited us into it—into ministry and mission to share God's love with our neighbors and with the world, as Jesus did. There, we will see him.

**God of blessing, thank you for including me in your work
of loving and blessing the world. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Confirmation teachers,
mentors, and students*

Psalm 16:8-11; Daniel 12:1-3; Acts 2:14, 22b-32

What will be

**You do not sow the body that is to be,
but a bare seed. (v. 37)**

As autumn comes, preparations are made for the long winter months. On a brown hill, unsightly daffodil bulbs are planted with expectant hope. Winter approaches, with reminders of life's frailty and brevity. For a season the buried bulbs lie dormant. Then spring arrives with a sunny transformation: On a green hill, what once seemed unremarkable now blooms in glory. The Easter flowers become signs of hope, joy, and new life to passersby.

Paul speaks of resurrection as transformation, using contrasting images of death and life. What once was perishable, dishonorable, and weak becomes imperishable, glorious, and powerful by God's grace. In attempting to explain a divine mystery, words often fail. But at the heart of Paul's faith—and ours—are the faithfulness and promises of God. Though we don't know what it will look like or how it will be, our rising will be glorious too, as you and I are renewed in the image of Christ.

**God of wonder, help me to see signs of resurrection
and new life around me today. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Florists

Genesis 1:20—2:4a; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Mourning into dancing

**This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it. (v. 24)**

A caravan of volunteers embarks on a journey to the homes of Special Church members. Special Church is a community of God's beloved children with special needs. They have not been able to gather recently because of restrictions due to COVID-19. So Special Church goes on the road: caregivers bring the word, prayers, and songs to God's children where they live. There are face coverings and physical distancing. But there is also singing, laughing, and spirited dancing among the mentors and those whom they love alike.

I imagine the writer of today's psalm rejoicing in a similar way, with gratitude and love for what God has done. The Lord has delivered the psalmist from a calamity, bringing life from death.

For times when we are helped and delivered from critical situations, may our rejoicing be as thankful, loving, and spirited as that of the psalmist, and as that of Special Church.

Beautiful Savior, thank you for helping me smile, sing, and dance in response to all you have done. Amen.

Prayer concern: Caregivers and those they serve

Song of Solomon 3:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

Step by step

**All who believed were together
and had all things in common. (v. 44)**

Early followers of the risen Jesus were known as People of the Way. "The Way" refers to a daily life choice to live in community, with Christ as the center. Each day was a new chance for these disciples to turn together to God through the spiritual practices of worship, learning, praying, sharing meals, and caring for those in need. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, People of the Way chose life, day by day.

Each day can be a new rising for us too—a gift and opportunity to make life-giving choices. By God's grace, each day can be Easter as we set our hearts and minds on Christ. Through worship and learning, prayer, hospitality, and generosity, we too walk together as People of the Way into life overflowing with grace, compassion, and love.

May today be an Easter day of new beginnings and abundant life for you. And may the sights and sounds of resurrection and new life you encounter remind you of God's abundant love. Step by step and day by day.

Loving God, thank you for today's rising and your promise to make all things new, through Christ. Amen.

Prayer concern: New believers

Psalm 133; Daniel 1:1-21

Emboldened

**They were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and spoke the word of God with boldness. (v. 31)**

After being arrested for speaking about Jesus, resurrection, and new life, Peter and John are released with a warning: “Cease and desist.” They return to their fellow believers and share the news of their censorship. The People of the Way respond to this obstacle by asking God for strength and courage to keep sharing the story of Jesus with the world. God answers their prayer by empowering them with the Holy Spirit. Emboldened, the People of the Way continue to speak about Jesus, changing the world as they do.

Public speaking is one of the *big* fears for many people. But on a memorable Stewardship Sunday, Grace rises from her pew, stands before the congregation, and shares her story of Jesus with her fellow believers. She speaks from her heart about God’s generosity. She sings from her soul about Jesus’ love and how he makes a difference in her life. The Holy Spirit still emboldens. And the People of the Way, in this particular time and place, respond as one: “Amen!”

**Empowering God, help me share your love today
by what I say and do. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Speech therapists

Psalm 133; Daniel 2:1-23

Precious love

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

The psalm writer links unity among the people of God with abundance, blessing, and life. Sadly, unity is not always present among people of faith. Fear, anxiety, and uncertainty can lead to discord and division, impeding life as God intends it. Uniting around trust in God’s presence and promises of provision and protection, and living out that faith, can lead to life overflowing with blessing.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens such unity. Yet amid fear and uncertainty, believers in my community, and likely in yours too—beloved and blessed children of God—link together around the common goal of feeding hungry neighbors. Food is collected and given to local food banks, and tables overflow. Monetary donations are given to community relief organizations, and a great need is generously met. People’s lives are made better, especially for the most vulnerable. There is blessing and life among God’s people.

**Precious Lord, thank you for blessing me
so that I may bless others. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Food bank volunteers
and those whom they serve*

Daniel 2:24-49; John 12:44-50



Second Sunday of Easter

Jesus came and stood among them and said,
 "Peace be with you." (v. 26)

Even after Mary shared the good news that she had seen the Lord, the disciples sequestered themselves behind a locked door in fear. But the hope of the world entered that room. Peace entered the room. Abundant life entered, unlocking their door and giving them what they needed to move forward into a new beginning.

What about you and me? We too are freed from the power and places of death as the hope of the world enters the room of our life. Peace enters the room. Abundant life enters the room. Christ himself comes and stands with us, giving himself as life for the world.

Moving forward, we experience for ourselves the risen Jesus in the love we give each other, in forgiving and being forgiven, in the kindness and compassion of listening and supporting, and in the prayers and support that help a community of faith move from mourning to rejoicing, from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

**Comforting God, thank you for Christ, our peace,
 who empowers us to move forward
 into your new beginning. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Those struggling with fear
 and anxiety*

Psalm 133; Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1–2:2

Compassion

I am writing you a new commandment that is true
 in him and in you. (v. 8)

On one hand, the writer of this letter says, "Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment" (v. 7). But in the next verse we read, "I am writing you a new commandment." God's love and God's command to love were not new with Jesus. So what *is* new?

The newness is the Incarnation. While God had long worked through people, in Jesus God came *in person* to show compassion and set an example of self-giving love. Compassion is sympathy or empathy for someone struggling; it's also *suffering with* someone. I've seen both forms lived out during the pandemic.

A community shelters in place for the well-being of neighbors; school, work, and even worship go digital and remote. Volunteers deliver groceries and prescriptions to homebound elders. Medical professionals put themselves at risk, selflessly and tirelessly caring for the sick. And each day we find new ways to obey God's age-old commandment by loving others as Jesus did.

**Compassionate Lord, thank you for your grace
 that helps me love as you love. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Medical professionals,
 first responders, and essential workers*

Psalm 135; Daniel 3:1-30

Song and dance

Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good. (v. 3)

“God is good!” “All the time!” “All the time!” “God is good!” This call-and-response greeting, perhaps especially familiar to Bible campers, affirms the truth of God’s goodness. In its own way it is a psalm of praise, and when spoken or sung, it can kindle recollections of what God has done for the people God deeply loves. For instance:

In the gift and blessing of each new day—God is good!
For the beauty of creation and God’s creativity—all the time!

For guiding us safely through our wilderness places—
all the time!

In providing for and protecting us—God is good!

In calling us beloved children—God is good!

For forgiving us and setting us free—all the time!

For healing and restoring us—all the time!

In loving us and calling us home—God is good!

With thanks for what God has done and is doing, and with trust in what God will do, let us join with the psalmist in the song of praise and the dance of life.

**Faithful God, we praise you for your goodness
and thank you for your gracious love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Camp counselors

Daniel 6:1-28; 1 John 2:12-17

Shelter and protection

Trust in the LORD forever, for in the LORD God
you have an everlasting rock. (v. 4)

Some years ago, I learned to scuba dive. It opened up a whole new world for me. The first thing I learned in my certification training was not to panic—remain calm—because problems can occur under the water that are made worse by panicking. The second thing I learned was to never dive alone. Diving alone can be dangerous. Dive buddies keep each other safe and help each other stay calm. They can keep each other alive by trusting each other.

The words sung in Isaiah are encouragement to trust God for protection. In times of trouble, danger, conflict, and challenge, God is a safe refuge. In times of troubled waters, God is a secure rock to which we can cling. In times of raging storms, the Just One is a peaceful shelter we can call home. At the heart of this life-giving promise is God’s power in which we can trust for protection—power that extends from God’s deep love for you and for all in need of shelter, today and every day.

**Sheltering God, thank you for loving me, protecting me,
and providing for me. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: People working
or playing in water today*

Psalm 135; Mark 12:18-27

Help me, O God**Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer. (v. 1)**

What are you lamenting today? And who do you turn to for help? Sometimes grief, illness, or discouragement leaves us feeling helpless and alone. Sometimes adverse situations we can't control shake our sense of safety and security; our footing, once so sure, is no longer so. Psalm 4 reminds us that in times of trouble there is One who walks beside us, listening, abiding, rescuing, gladdening, and securing us. In a season of suffering, the psalmist turns to God, trusting that God will answer prayers and provide deliverance. And even in the most distressing hour there is hope, wholeness, and peace.

As you continue on your journey, whatever that road is and wherever it takes you, embrace the promise that One walks with you who hears you, sees you, and loves you deeply. And as you walk, maybe you will be a companion for someone else today, reminding them of God's love. Maybe you will be the one who gives someone who is feeling separated and alone some peace, love, and hope to hold onto, just by being there for them.

Good and gracious God, thank you for hearing me when I call to you. In your loving name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those grieving the loss of employment

Daniel 9:1-19; 1 John 2:18-25

Abide in Christ**And now, little children, abide in him. (v. 28)**

I am writing these devotions during the COVID-19 pandemic and the appeals to stay home to save lives. Unlike many people, I have a safe, comfortable home in which to abide. Yet threats of the virus permeate my home's walls. It is difficult to know which messages are true and which are meant to mislead or deceive us. Economic stress grows. People's fears are understandable and real.

Even as we encounter enormous problems that are far beyond our personal control, abiding in Christ brings us comfort. As the early Christians confronted deceptive messages, we can claim confidence in the truth. Christ came, lived as a human, died for all people, and will return. The Holy Spirit abides in us now. We are God's beloved little children. Abiding in Christ, we have a security that no home's walls can provide. As we abide in Christ, God's grace abides in us. Whatever the stresses of daily life, we are not alone. God will never forsake us.

Gracious God, whatever problems we face, help us abide in you as you abide in us. In Christ. Amen.

Prayer concern: People without a safe place to live

Psalm 4; Daniel 10:2-19

Serve with one another

The greatest among you must become . . .
like one who serves. (v. 26)

My father had a heart attack in his nineties. After *another* follow-up healthcare appointment on *another* snowy day, in *another* snow-packed parking lot, I helped Dad into the car and then worked to load his wheelchair into the trunk. A stranger walking by approached me and said, "I know you can do it, but let me help you this one time." With his added lift on the wheelchair, it slid into the trunk. He did not wait for thanks or praise, but walked on.

I have remembered this stranger's service for over a dozen years largely because he did not take over and load the wheelchair *for* me. Instead, he served *with* me. He maintained my dignity and affirmed my ability. Often we serve by doing *for* someone as if they were incompetent. At times, we act like benefactors who deserve gratitude. However, when we work *with* people, we learn together and affirm each other. We share the joy of mutually answering God's call to serve one another.

**God, we know you created everyone with abilities.
Help us serve together as Christ commanded. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: ELCA Global Mission
accompaniment work*

Psalm 4; Acts 3:1-10



Third Sunday of Easter

While in their joy they were disbelieving
and still wondering . . . (v. 41)

"If it seems too good to be true, it probably is." Often this is a wise warning. Perhaps it was what the disciples thought. They may have *wanted* to believe Jesus had risen and was with them, but after the ghastly crucifixion, it probably seemed too good to be true. Jesus responded to their disbelief by welcoming their touch. Echoing the disciples' disbelief, seventeenth-century English clergyman Thomas Fuller said, "Seeing is believing, but feeling is the truth."

Like the disciples, I sometimes stray into disbelieving and wondering. I *do* have joy in knowing Jesus died for me and rose again. However, sometimes I begin to wonder: Can forgiveness and grace really be so simple? What about those verses that say to give up everything and everyone? What if I do not fully love my neighbors *and my enemies*? Such thoughts can fuel my disbelief. At these times, I plead like the father of an ill boy did: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). And Jesus responds to my disbelief as well.

**Gracious God, I believe. Please help my disbelief!
Through your Son's death and resurrection, I pray. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: All who are disbelieving
and wondering*

Psalm 4; Acts 3:12-19; 1 John 3:1-7

Forgive to live and love

Whoever does not love abides in death. (v. 14)

Sometimes I dwell on my anger with a neighbor near or far. Soon, I lack concentration and cannot complete tasks well. I lose sleep and become exhausted. Annoyed with my ongoing complaints, my friends and family retreat from me. As my anger approaches hatred, it can hinder my communication with God. Surely this is a form of death!

Today is National Oklahoma City Bombing Commemoration Day, the remembrance of a deadly US event. A father who lost his daughter in the disaster came to forgive one of the bombers. He said, "It was a release for me." The Forgiveness Project, which focuses on rebuilding lives after trauma, shares many such restorative narratives. Likewise, eleven years after her husband's assassination and thirty-two years ago this month, Coretta Scott King said, "Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated." If we lose ourselves in hate, we are dead. We must forgive in order to live and to love our neighbors.

Loving God, as you forgive me in Jesus, help me to forgive so I can live to love my neighbors. Amen.

Prayer concern: Trauma victims who endeavor to forgive

Psalms 150; Jeremiah 30:1-11a

Love allows choice

Love one another. . . This is the commandment . . .
you must walk in it. (vv. 5-6)

My mother, a former third-grade teacher, told this story about playground problems. She asked a little girl who seemed always to be at the problems' epicenter to explain what she thought was happening during recess. The girl replied, "If everyone would do things *my* way, there wouldn't be any problems." We chuckle at the unlikely success of the little girl's plan. However, do we ever critique other people's behaviors and think, "If they would just do it *my* way . . .?"

Being able to choose how we do things in life affirms and dignifies us. Choice allows me to meet my needs as I think is best in my particular situations. It is a way I love myself. Since God calls us to love one another as we love ourselves, I must allow my neighbors choices in how they live *their* lives. I need to remember that walking in the commandment of loving one another means I cannot impose my ways such that I deprive my neighbors of choices. Love allows choice.

Gracious God, thank you for allowing us choice. Help us allow our neighbors choice as we love them. Amen.

Prayer concern: Lutheran World Relief's partnerships

Psalms 150; Hosea 5:15-6:6

Listen and believe

[Jesus] upbraided them . . . because they had not believed those who saw him. (v. 14)

I wonder how Mary Magdalene felt when the other followers didn't believe she had seen the risen Lord. Was she frustrated, angry, hurt? Perhaps she was used to being discounted and disregarded.

How did the two who walked in the country with Jesus feel about being disbelieved? Were they "outsiders" partially marginalized from the inner group?

I have been discounted. I expect you have been too. Remarks such as "Maybe you misunderstood" or "That *cannot* be" indicate the hearer disbelieves our reports about our experiences. Regrettably, I have also made such remarks. Society frequently disregards experiences of individuals and groups it considers outsiders, incapable, or inferior. Jesus scolded the eleven for not believing the experiences told them. We also must listen to people whose life experiences differ from ours. Then we must believe them! This is the path to truth and justice for all.

God, as St. Francis of Assisi prayed, help us seek to understand more than to be understood. Amen.

Prayer concern: People who are unheard or disbelieved

Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 150

Come to the table

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. (v. 5)

This psalm's first verses are ideal for Earth Day, beautifully describing the creation we share. Its words have also comforted many, including my farmer father, during their final days and, later, their mourning families. Yet its words can encourage us for daily life too.

The psalm doesn't say our lives will be without trials and enemies. Indeed, society has become polarized. In our divisiveness, we've lost sight that people we once welcomed as good neighbors we now exclude as enemies. Yet I suspect that whatever our views, we are comforted and encouraged by the *same* words of this psalm, including the promise of the bountiful table prepared by our Lord for all.

When I get to that heavenly feast, I imagine I'll be surprised at who else is there! But why wait? Through God's love and grace let's gather around the table now. While rejoicing in our diversity, let's listen genuinely to each other as we break bread together.

Lord, lead me to your table now. Let me not wait for eternity to dine with all your children. Amen.

Prayer concern: Dialogue groups seeking understanding

Genesis 30:25-43; Acts 3:17-26

Speak up!

[The leaders] came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching the people. (vv. 1-2)

I fret when people are annoyed with me. I want to get back in their favor. (Yes, I also fret when I am annoyed with people; I want them to repent and get back in *my* favor!) I think twice before saying something that might lower people's opinions of me. For instance, I might choose to ignore someone's comments about "those" people and how "they" live. I can manage not to annoy people if I never dispute their denials of the devastation of racial and ethnic inequities. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called this "the appalling silence and indifference of the good people" (1963).

But I am writing this during the global outcries after George Floyd's 2020 death in police custody. When it comes to social injustices, I have learned I cannot be silent. I must denounce systemic racism and intolerance that affect all aspects of many people's lives. I need to stop fretting that I might annoy people. Along with Christ and all my siblings who face injustices, I must boldly speak up.

God, help me join your Son to speak up with all of your children who suffer from injustices. Amen.

Prayer concern: ELCA e-Advocacy

Genesis 46:28—47:6; Psalm 23

What would Jesus do?

He said, ". . . rest a while." . . . [But then] he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them. (vv. 31, 34)

I like to make to-do lists. It helps me focus. Crossing items off as I finish them gives me a sense of accomplishment. Often my list is overly ambitious and the day ends with unfinished items.

Sometimes items on my list remain unfinished because, like Jesus and his disciples, I encounter interruptions. Many people refer to this as the "ministry of interruptions." Martin Luther said we are part of the "priesthood of all believers," meaning that God calls *all* of us to ministry—including this ministry of interruptions. We may be interrupted by a family member who wants help or a friend who needs to talk about a problem. Perhaps an advocacy issue requires immediate phone calls to legislators. Whatever the interruption, we can ask ourselves the popular 1990s question "What would Jesus do?" (WWJD). If the interruption is an actual need and we can help, maybe we should respond. Perhaps God has something important to add to our to-do list.

Compassionate God, show me how to respond like Jesus to the things you place on my to-do list. Amen.

Prayer concern: Crisis hotline callers and responders

Genesis 48:8-19; Psalm 23



Fourth Sunday of Easter

I must bring [other sheep] also. . . . So there will be one flock, one shepherd. (v. 16)

Today is often called Good Shepherd Sunday. The gospel focuses on Jesus' role as the good shepherd—not on our actions as sheep. Sheep are not bright animals who can fend for themselves. Their limited view is of the grass on which they are currently grazing, their shepherd, and their flock. Close your eyes and picture the other people in your flock. Are they mostly sheep who resemble you?

Our Good Shepherd has a broader view than we sheep do. Beyond our small pasture he has and cares for a variety of other sheep grazing near and far. The text does not expressly identify these other sheep. Even so, close your eyes again and imagine the other sheep our Good Shepherd calls into the one flock. Is the flock the same as you first pictured or different? What other sheep may recognize the Shepherd's voice? Perhaps it would be exciting to start now to join and graze with sheep who may be our future flockmates!

Good Shepherd, help me start, even now, to recognize and join with other sheep who listen to your voice. Amen.

Prayer concern: Ecumenical and interfaith initiatives

Psalm 23; Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24

Mark, Evangelist

The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. (v. 7)

John the Baptist was Jesus' "advance man." He knew he was not the "star." He was comfortable in his supporting role. Today we also remember Mark, the evangelist. He wasn't the star either. He was an "eyewitness reporter" through the gospel that bears his name. It can be hard to have a supporting role without public recognition. Yet Luther taught that we can serve God in *all* our life's roles.

For example, a couple who were both solo pastors adopted a newborn. Soon the pandemic hit. Their calendars overflowed with virtual meetings, services, phone calls, and other needs. One day their neighbor, a retiree, stopped them. He said he knew their schedules were hectic with ministry demands. He explained that he and his grandson wanted to mow the pastors' lawn so they would have more time to fulfill their ministries. The neighbor and his grandson's lawn-mowing was a supporting role, not in the "spotlight." Yet was it valuable service? Indeed!

God, strengthen me to serve you willingly, faithfully, and humbly in all of my life's roles. Amen.

Prayer concern: People who serve without recognition

Psalm 57; Isaiah 52:7-10; 2 Timothy 4:6-11, 18

Open our hands

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (v. 17)

No hunger, thirst, or tears sounds good! However, because my needs are well met, this promise seems less urgent to me than it might to many people. A future without needs may be somewhat comforting to my neighbors facing ordeals. But what about their needs and tears *now*? I worked with a group whose goal was to end long-term poverty. It was criticized as anti-biblical because Christ said, “You [will] always have the poor with you” (Matthew 26:11). To be clear, Christ was quoting Deuteronomy 15:11, which continues, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor” to end their poverty.

We await plenty in the kingdom to come. Yet we also believe the kingdom is here now. Christ declared that in him “the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17). Thus, what is our call in the kingdom *now*? Is it enough to tell our neighbors they will have plenty in the kingdom *to come*? Instead, how can we open our hands to meet their needs and wipe away their tears *now*?

Loving God, thank you for your promise
of the kingdom to come and for empowering
our work in the kingdom now. Amen.

Prayer concern: Lutheran Services in America

1 Chronicles 11:1-9; Psalm 95

Delight in showing clemency

He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in showing clemency. (v. 18)

My first social work internship was at a Jewish social service agency. I took a request from a person who was Black. Based on the stereotypes I held then, I replied that the person surely was not part of the agency’s community. I was terribly wrong! Later in the internship, a faculty member urged me to apologize for Martin Luther’s anti-Semitism. As an individual and as a Lutheran church member, I grievously needed and generously received clemency—unmerited mercy.

Whether we admit it or not, we all have sinned (Romans 3:23). We need forgiveness. Just as God is merciful with us, we all need to show everyone mercy and leniency (Ephesians 4:32). Moreover, research has found that forgiveness does not only benefit the person forgiven; it helps the forgiver by improving their mental and physical health (Mayo Clinic, 2017). As God delights in showing us clemency, we can delight in showing our neighbors clemency *and* in sharing improved health!

Compassionate God, as you mercifully and leniently
forgive us, help us forgive our neighbors. Amen.

Prayer concern: Courts that balance justice
with clemency

Psalm 95; Mark 14:26-31

Amid peril, proclaim hope

The crowds with one accord listened eagerly
to what was said by Philip. (v. 6)

During the pandemic, it seems the public most appreciates leaders who are transparent about the danger, yet who conclude their messages with proclamations of hope. They, along with celebrities and organizations, constantly assure us, “We will get through this” and “We can do this together.” In dire times, people need to hear and proclaim words of hope that sustain them and stave off despair.

In today’s text, the early church was under persecution, and the believers were scattered. Yet they faithfully clung to and proclaimed the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection that conquered sin. People in Samaria were eager to hear Philip. His words and the accompanying healing signs brought them joy. Amid their peril, the gospel message of hope sustained both the proclaimers and the hearers. During difficult times, we too can proclaim God’s love and mercy to bring our neighbors much-needed hope. This is the hope that sustains us all.

Gracious God, help me share the good news of your Son’s resurrection that brings us all hope. Amen.

Prayer concern: Hospital chaplains

Psalm 22:25-31; Amos 8:1-7

God’s free gift

You thought you could obtain God’s gift with money! (v. 20)

I recall a reciprocity custom. When you received a gift of food in a serving dish, you returned that dish refilled with food you had prepared for the initial giver. It was not a *free* gift! This custom seems to have stuck with me; I still do not like to feel beholden to anyone. Often I offer to pay people for items or assistance they sincerely want to give me free of charge.

In this Acts text, Simon wanted to buy God’s gift. (Simon’s sinful intent was to use the gift to boost his popularity and power.) Peter sternly told Simon that God’s gift could not be obtained with money. Peter’s response reminds me of the song “The Best Things in Life Are Free.” Its lyrics proclaim that creation is free to everyone and romantic love can come to anyone (DeSilva & Brown, 1927). Ironically, this song is from the musical *Good News*. Of course, the *real* good news is that the best thing in life—God’s gracious love—is a gift for everyone. It is free!

Generous God, thank you for your saving love that you freely give via your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer concern: Church musicians sharing the good news

Psalm 22:25-31; Amos 8:11-13

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