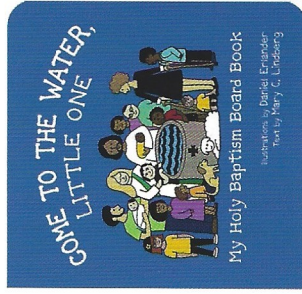


Come to the Water, Little One

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.



Order online at augsburfortress.org/cttw or call **800.328.4648**

ISBN: 978-1-5064-5850-2



AUGSBURG FORTRESS

Christ in Our Home

April, May, June

2021



April, May, June 2021

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

Scripture readings are from the *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings* © 2005 Consultation on Common Texts. Used by permission. The texts for Thursday through Saturday prepare for the Sunday readings, while the texts for Monday through Wednesday reflect upon the Sunday readings. Texts specific to festivals and commemorations are used when appropriate.

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved. Quotations marked ELW are reprinted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, copyright © 2006. Cover photo: Spring flowers in basket iStock/49pauly

CHRIST IN OUR HOME (ISSN 0412-2968), published quarterly by Augsburg Fortress, 510 Marquette Ave., STE 800, Minneapolis, MN 55402-1119. Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, Minnesota, and additional mailing offices. Subscriptions \$8.50 per year (\$12.50, large print). Copyright © 2021 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. USPS Publication Agreement Number 1631527. Canadian Publication Agreement Number 40030418.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHRIST IN OUR HOME Subscriptions, Augsburg Fortress, P.O. Box 1553, Minneapolis, MN 55440-8730.

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.

Philip and James, Apostles

[Jesus said.] "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do." (v. 12)

The one who believes in Jesus is entrusted with the work of Jesus. That included Philip and James, apostles remembered today. And it includes you and me, and lots of other folk!

When Jesus walked this earth, he helped people one day at a time, one person at a time. We can do that. We don't have to miraculously cure ailments or feed more than five thousand people at once. A kind word, a helping hand, a few dollars may not seem like much. But consider a whole community of believers, and a community of communities, all doing the works Jesus did. One by one, they add up!

Risky? For sure. When I was first entrusted with the family car, it didn't go well. I hit our mailbox. But my parents kept trusting me. Likewise, even when we don't handle things perfectly, Jesus trusts us with the responsibility of making life better for everyone we can by living out his love in the world.

How remarkable to follow in the footsteps of Philip and James in doing the work of Jesus.

**Trusting God, give me courage and faith
to do the work of Jesus. In his name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Pastors who equip and encourage

Psalm 44:1-3, 20-26; Isaiah 30:18-21; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6



Fifth Sunday of Easter

**Every branch that bears fruit [my Father] prunes
to make it bear more fruit. (v. 2)**

In my first call as a pastor, I developed a friendship with a guy who took part in Alcoholics Anonymous. So when people came to me on occasion because they were struggling with alcoholism, I would ask if they wanted to talk with my friend.

My friend in AA had been there. In his words, he "had been a drunk," so he knew about the addiction, the helplessness, the regret, the struggle. But he also knew about hope and freedom and helping others. The old dead branches of his struggle had been cut away, thrown into the fire. "With God's help," my friend would say, "with God's help."

When I was a kid, I watched my father prune trees. He was like a wild man. I would think to myself, "That tree will never come back." But it did, more beautiful than before.

If my father and those trees are any example, being pruned is not such a pleasant experience. My friend in AA would agree. But when I knew him, he was beautiful, simply beautiful.

**God, thank you for pruning away what is harmful in me
so I can grow beautiful in your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who struggle with addiction

Psalm 22:25-31; Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 4:7-21

Living fruitfully

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness . . . (v. 22)

In this reading, the words themselves are powerful. Say “jealousy” or “anger.” Then say “kindness” or “gentleness.” Right away, you know which you want to exhibit and experience. The first two make me feel uncomfortable; the other two make me feel safe.

Sorcery isn’t something very common in our day. But in the same sentence Paul names quarrels and envy, anger and factions. Those hit closer to home.

The stakes are high here because, as redeemed disciples of Jesus, we do not live in isolation. Life and faith are not just about God and me. The words and traits in this passage aren’t primarily about making *me* feel comfortable; they’re about how I bless my neighbor.

The writer here is like a loving parent who knows what is best for the child, but also what sort of person the parent wants the child to become. The writer urges the Galatians, and us, to “be guided by the Spirit” (v. 25) so our fruitful lives can bless the lives of others.

Lord God, help me as your child to choose well how to live, that my life may bless others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayer concern: All who are homeless

Psalm 80; Isaiah 5:1-7

A peaceful habitation

The effect of righteousness will be peace. (v. 17)

Often the last words we hear spoken in worship are: “The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace,” then “Go in peace; serve the Lord.” Among many other aspects of worship, we have been led by the Spirit to confess our sin and have been declared forgiven. There is no condemnation. Nothing separates us from God.

Righteousness means being in a right relationship with others and with God. We are righteous *because God says so*. The result of such righteousness, such deliverance from condemnation, is peace. Unless . . .

Unless our newfound peace doesn’t carry forward into our daily life. Counted righteous by God, we are now empowered to set our other relationships right: relationships with family, friends, neighbors, maybe even self. To have the tough conversation, to make the apology, to regain trust, to forgive ourselves.

Usually the first step (receiving God’s gift of righteousness) is easier than the second (setting right our relationships with others). But the second is necessary if we want to know the peace spoken over us at the close of worship.

Lord God, help me find peace in you, with my neighbor, and in myself. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Peacemakers around the world

Psalm 80; James 3:17-18

The gift of hope

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth. (v. 17)

Hope. Hope that our children will be okay. Hope that the crops will be good this year. Hope that conflict can be resolved. Perhaps you've said things like this: "Today was hard. I hope tomorrow is better." "I hope my health improves." "I hope and pray God will bring an end to hatred and violence."

God speaks a word of hope through Isaiah to people who have known much suffering. "No more shall the sound of weeping be heard" (v. 19). The hope and promise of a new beginning—of peace and well-being—make all the difference.

The promises of God give hope. Hope can keep us working on relationships, encourage the farmer to plant once again, give leaders the resolve to settle a conflict. Does it mean tomorrow will be better for certain, that there will be no problems in the future? We know the answer. But hope is the gift that helps us begin. So we hang onto it, celebrate it, and give thanks to God.

Lord of all hopefulness, thank you for the marvelous gift of hope in your good promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Farmers, who feed the world

Psalm 80; John 14:18-31

Praise for God's marvelous gifts

O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things. (v. 1)

Picture some images of joy: A child opening a birthday present. An employee coming home after being promoted. A couple discovering they're going to have a baby or learning their adoption has been finalized. Grandparents answering the door to grandchildren who have come to visit. Joy is often seen in laughter and cheering and hugging.

Now picture images of worship: People gathered—in person, or over digital platforms—praying, hearing the word proclaimed, and singing praise to God. Praise to this God who forgives and loves and is present each day in faithfulness.

Not every day will be joy-filled. Even a new job or parenting routine is tedious at times. After a week, grandparents are ready for time alone. And face it, no one feels like singing praise every day.

We live in a real world with struggles and pain. But today we raise our voices in praise, for even amid suffering, God does marvelous things—not least of which is being with us.

Lord, thank you for every marvelous gift that comes to surprise me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Church musicians and choir directors

Isaiah 49:5-6; Acts 10:1-34

Anointed to do good

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; [and] he went about doing good. (v. 38)

Among the many words about Jesus, I love these: “He went about doing good.” We will never be hailed Savior—nor should we be—but wouldn’t we all like our obituary to say we “went about doing good”?

A man found his friend reading the Bible and weeping. He asked what was wrong. The friend said, “I’ve been reading about how Jesus went about doing good. I realize I just go about.” Maybe we should all weep, but that wouldn’t help. I suggest another way.

When I was overweight, I joined like-minded people to share struggles, failures, and successes and to encourage one another in our mission to lose weight. As the church, we join like-minded people—not that we are all the same, but that we worship the same God—to share struggles, fears, life, faith, and worship. We encourage one another on our mission of going about doing good in Jesus’ name. And because, like Jesus, we are anointed with the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to do just that.

Gracious God, help me to be on the lookout for opportunities to do good. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayer concern: ELCA World Hunger

Psalm 98; Isaiah 42:5-9

Upside down

But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant. (v. 43)

A world turned upside down: leaders serving, no one hungry, no one considered less-than. This is what God intends and what Jesus shows us. See how he treats women as equal to men, invites those of low status to be his friends, tells a rich man he will find joy in sharing his wealth.

So those who confess Jesus as Lord, who exist *in* the world but are not *of* the world, are called to live and act not as the world does but as God intends, and as Jesus demonstrates: as servants.

As I write during a time of civil unrest and COVID-19, many followers of Jesus are advocating for racial justice and are wearing masks to protect others. Many churches are keeping their buildings closed to avoid spreading disease, though we’d love to gather in person. Conversely, though being in crowds puts one at risk of the virus, some churches are feeding or marching with protesters. In countless ways Jesus empowers us to serve—to turn the world upside down.

Lord, bless your servant congregations and disciples with faith and courage. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Congregational servant leaders

Deuteronomy 32:44-47; Psalm 98



Sixth Sunday of Easter

**This is my commandment, that you love one another
as I have loved you. (v. 12)**

I majored in literature. When possible, I stayed away from math. Then my son met fifth grade and Mrs. Johnson, the math teacher. Almost every day, math problems came home to be solved. My son struggled. I struggled. I began to not like Mrs. Johnson.

Which, you will tell me, is silly. And you are right. But perhaps such is true of many of our bad feelings about others. We get ourselves caught up in silly disagreements. Silly arguments. Silly fights.

Jesus does not ask us how we feel about this or that person. We are to “do” love. I am not sure it is possible to change our feelings at will. It *is* possible to change our actions. Perhaps our feelings will even follow, but if they don’t, we still will have honored Jesus’ command.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another,” says Jesus. He doesn’t ask how we feel about it.

**God, help me to be kind to all I meet on this journey
called life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Schoolteachers

Psalm 98; Acts 10:44-48; 1 John 5:1-6

Eternal life now

Take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called. (v. 12)

We commonly think of eternal life as something after our time on earth has ended, a place where God “will wipe every tear from [our] eyes [and] death will be no more” (Revelation 21:4). But eternal life is also about how we live now.

If you have been baptized, and if you were a baby or young child at the time, you probably weren’t paying much attention to what the pastor said. But when we are brought for baptism (even adults are “brought” by the Holy Spirit) and water is splashed on our heads or we are eased under the water, a pastor may say, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). That’s eternal life. Living in Christ so his light shines through us. Now.

We were created to love and praise God and to love and serve our neighbor. Who is our neighbor? If someone is in need and we have the means to help, that person is our neighbor. When we help our neighbor, we “take hold of the eternal life” God gives freely and follow Jesus’ call to live in love.

Eternal God, thank you for life now and forever. Amen.

Prayer concern: Hospice care workers

Deuteronomy 7:1-11; Psalm 93

This unlikely king

... he who is the blessed and only Sovereign,
the King of kings and Lord of lords. (v. 15)

What a remarkable thing to say about anyone, including Jesus! Born in a barn, carpenter's son, itinerant rabbi with a small group of followers: some fishermen, a tax collector. He helped a few people of low status, taught some new understandings of God, preached a few sermons. Finally, he was put to death as a criminal. Most thought that was the end of it. Until . . .

Until some women find his grave empty. Until his friends bump into him while taking a walk.

Standing before Pilate, Jesus had said, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." Pilate asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38). He was looking truth in the eye but failed to recognize it. Jesus is the truth about who God is, who we are, and who God intends us to be.

And above all, this: Jesus conquered death. Though he died, he lives. And he offers that gift to the whole world. So, yes, we proclaim this Jesus, who is one with God, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

God, thank you for sending Jesus, our Lord and King. Amen.

*Prayer concern: Those who tell the truth
no matter the cost*

Deuteronomy 11:1-17; Psalm 93

Reminders of who we are

You shall put these words of mine
in your heart and soul. (v. 18)

The passage continues: "Bind them as a sign on your hand. . . . Teach them to your children. . . . Write them on the doorposts of your house" (vv. 18-20).

Come into our home and you will see pictures. Grandparents, parents, our younger selves, children, grandchildren. My wife shows them to our grandsons: "This is your family; this is who you are."

Come into my office and you will see a plaque with a cross and the words "In the cross of Christ I glory"—a gift from the widow of a pastor who kept it in his office. I go for days without noticing it, but then I see it again, remember my friend, and am reminded that I'm a child of God, called to be a pastor, blessed beyond measure.

As those photos testify to a family's love, so that plaque gives witness to a friendship and to God's love. And as my wife tells the story of family, we pray that our lives tell the story of God's love, in the hope that our children and grandsons will know the comfort of both family and faith.

**God, may my life in matters great and small
bear witness to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Parents who pass on the faith

Psalm 93; Mark 16:19-20

Ascension of Our Lord

They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" (v. 11)

The disciples had just heard Jesus say, "You will receive power . . . and you will be my witnesses" (v. 8). Now they stand "looking up toward heaven," until two men ask why.

Sometimes I find it easier to focus on heaven than on the messy, broken world. I love worship and Bible study but spend less energy on making life better for my neighbors in practical ways. Does that mean I'm not giving witness to Jesus?

Maybe there are different ways to bear witness. You may be more comfortable shopping for elderly neighbors than bringing them communion. Maybe you feel called to fight for justice, but studying the threads of God's justice in scripture isn't your "thing."

Sent by Christ into the world, we bear witness in countless ways: serving and giving, studying and worshipping. Maybe the disciples, staring up into heaven, were pondering what their unique form of witness would be. Soon enough, the Holy Spirit would show them—and us.

God, give me courage to live my faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Family and friends who encourage us each day

Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

Matthias, Apostle

The lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles. (v. 26)

If you were asked to name a disciple of Jesus, Matthias might not be the first to come to mind. This passage in Acts is the first we hear of him, and the last as well.

To determine who should replace Judas among the disciples, the church prayed and cast lots. Today when the church chooses someone for a leadership role, we pray and vote. Either way sounds risky. But it's really not. Both Barsabbas and Matthias were qualified and faithful.

No magic. No audible voice from heaven. Rather, a very human church, guided by the Holy Spirit, doing the work necessary to continue the ministry of Jesus.

Matthias reminds me of myself. Maybe he reminds you of yourself. Ordinary people, chosen by God and claimed in baptism to let our light shine, doing the best we can. Like Matthias, you go about quietly doing good, making a difference. You may think nobody notices. But God notices. And the people you help do too.

When you think about it, that's *not* so ordinary!

God, thank you for choosing me through baptism to be your disciple. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Bishops in the ELCA

Psalm 56; Isaiah 66:1-2; Luke 6:12-16

Right and wrong

He will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. (v. 8)

I have forgotten a bunch of stuff I was taught at seminary, but pieces have stuck with me. One such word of wisdom is about the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to us and brings us to faith. So if we have faith in Jesus, then the Holy Spirit has accomplished it.

Today in John's gospel, we listen to what Jesus has to say about three things the world is wrong about: The world is wrong about sin. Sin does not define you. Your identity is not sinner. Your identity is child of God.

The world is wrong about righteousness. Righteousness is not something we achieve. It is a gift from God to you. You are right with God because God makes it so.

And the world is wrong about judgment. Death, the ruler of this world, does not have the final word. Good Friday does not have the final word. God's promise is Easter. God's promise is life.

Holy Spirit, thank you for opening our minds and hearts to hear and receive Jesus. Amen.

Prayer concern: Seminary teachers and staff

Deuteronomy 34:1-7; Psalm 47



Seventh Sunday of Easter

... so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. (v. 13)

Today we encounter Jesus' prayer for his disciples, which proclaims that they, God, and Jesus himself are inseparable. This is a powerful truth. Yet when I read this prayer, I feel as if I am setting off on a merry-go-round. The words begin their journey, swirl around in my brain, and then show up again, repeating much of what was already said. Jesus' prayer seems to reflect an old maxim for preachers: tell your listeners what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them.

But there is a phrase, *so that*, that tells us we're changing position while we swirl around, just as a spiral does. Jesus asks God to protect his disciples "so that they may be one, as we are one" (v. 11), and "so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves." He's telling us that we, the spiral's passengers, move around and upward, growing in unity and joy with God and each other. These are indeed powerful truths.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for making us one with you and the ever-creating God. Amen.

Prayer concern: Preachers

Psalm 1; Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; 1 John 5:9-13

Sharing grace

**You hold me in your heart, for all of you
share in God's grace with me. (v. 7)**

When COVID-19 struck, isolation was traumatic for many. Many jobs disappeared; loved ones were banished from our presence; video chats, phone calls, and even online worship replaced in-person connection.

Imprisonment is another form of isolation. The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison. Friends of mine who have been in prison say being isolated from the world and emotionally distanced from others is awful. How could Paul, as a prisoner, remain thankful, joyful, and hopeful? He knew God was his witness and Jesus' compassion his companion. What's more, the Philippians shared God's grace with him, held him in their hearts, and partnered with him in the gospel during his time of isolation.

So too in our time do we share God's grace in a million ways. May we encourage those who live in loneliness, distress, and fear. And when we feel isolated and in need, may we sense our partners in the gospel holding us in their hearts.

**Help us realize, Jesus, that we can be there
for the hurting no matter what. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those in any kind of isolation

Exodus 28:29-38; Psalm 115

At three a.m.

The LORD has been mindful of us; he will bless us. (v. 12)

Some nights at three a.m. I lie awake and try to find answers for pandemics, dementia, and other forms of human suffering. Who do I think I am—someone who can take on these horrific situations and fix them myself? I must think I am God. I shout "Stop!" (in my mind, because my husband is sleeping). Then I let the Holy Spirit turn me back to God, who is so mindful of us that God chooses to be with us even amid life's deepest struggles.

Perhaps part of God's answer to pandemics, grave illnesses, injustice, and other problems that feel insurmountable is for us to be mindful of others, and to use God's blessings to be a blessing to others. At three a.m. what I *can* do is think of some ways to do that: wear a mask in public, love and care for my husband who has dementia, educate myself about how to be anti-racist, and so much more. I pray that God will continue to show me such responses—at all hours—and that as I do what I *can* do, others will sense that God is mindful of and blesses them.

**Gracious God, thank you for your patience when we
get full of ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those focused only on self

Numbers 8:5-22; Titus 1:1-9

What can we ask for?

If you ask anything of the Father in my name,
he will give it to you. (v. 23)

For years I picked up kids for church in our well-worn church van. All of these kids lived below the poverty line. The phrase “I sure want” often rang out as we bounced along: “I sure want that car.” “I sure want those shoes.” “I sure want to live there.” What they wanted was a car so mom and dad could get to work, shoes that fit and weren’t hand-me-downs, and a safe neighborhood.

Jesus tells us to ask and we’ll receive. Like the kids, we adults have our list of things that we sure want to have: “I sure want the tests to be negative.” “I sure want to keep my job.” “I sure want to stay in my home.” God understands that all of us want shelter, clothing, economic stability, and a life without fear.

How does God respond when we cry out? God, like a midwife, helps us move through the pain of our heartfelt yearnings and gifts us with the Spirit’s power to work for well-being and wholeness for everyone. Just so is our joy complete.

In your name, Lord Jesus, we ask that you would strengthen us to work for justice and peace. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who live in poverty and fear

Ezra 9:5-15; Psalm 115

The power of unfailing love

Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us. (v. 22)

I listened as my friend spoke of the difficulties her adult child and grandchild faced as part of living with autism. While the abilities and experiences of people on the autism spectrum vary widely, some are viewed and treated negatively by others and experience social anxiety and emotional suffering. My friend’s heart was heavy with the challenges her loved ones dealt with personally and in society.

What could she do? My friend sighed and said, “All I can do is love them.” And she does so, unfailingly. We know that God, too, loves them steadfastly—as God loves us all. In Hebrew that kind of love is called *hesed*. It’s a concept difficult to translate into English, but we use words like *steadfast love*, *mercy*, *grace*, and *loving-kindness*. It’s the kind of love my friend has for all her family members, including those with special needs. In witnessing such powerful love among people, we glimpse the steadfast love of God hailed in Psalm 33.

Thank you, God, for your *hesed*, accepting us in our uniquenesses and supporting us in our needs. Amen.

Prayer concern: For greater acceptance in society for people with special needs

Genesis 2:4b-7; 1 Corinthians 15:42b-49

The gift of salvation

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (v. 57)

Has someone ever asked you, "Am I saved?" I was asked that a number of times when I served a community of men who were homeless, were addicted to drugs, and had criminal records. I understood their anxiety because others were telling them that they were going straight to hell. When they asked me, I would answer, "Salvation is God's business, not mine. What I can tell you is that God loves you like crazy, right now and always."

The Roman followers of Jesus wondered what would happen to them when they died. They had argued about whether or not they would be saved. The apostle Paul gave them beautiful assurance. The men I served weren't always satisfied with mine.

How hard it is to realize that God's grace saves us—and everyone else. None of us save ourselves. As hard as it is to believe sometimes, we are invited to trust in the victory God gives us through Jesus Christ, and to share the assurance of that gift with others.

**Lord Jesus, help us to live for others,
not for ourselves. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who live in fear of hell

Job 37:1-13; Psalm 33:12-22

Water and more water

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me. (v. 37)

I am a water guzzler. I toss down eight glasses of water or more every day. My doctor loves that I do that. I love it even more. There aren't many times when I am genuinely thirsty, with no relief in sight. I am a privileged person to have such access to clean drinking water.

Do you remember those weary Israelites following Moses in the desert? When they realized there was neither water nor food there, they let Moses have it. It wasn't a pretty picture. Then God stepped in. Food fell from the skies and water gushed out of a rock.

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me," Jesus invites the crowd on the last and greatest day of the Festival of Booths in Jerusalem, where they celebrated how God, through Moses, had met their ancestors' needs in the desert. Now Jesus invites them—and us—to receive more than nature's H₂O. He proclaims *living* water that will quench our thirst for the living God and flow from our hearts to others thirsting for God's love, joy, and peace. May we drink this living water deeply every day.

**Jesus the Christ, move us to share your living water
with everyone, every day, wherever we go. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Those spiritually thirsty
or lacking safe water to quench physical thirst*

Exodus 15:6-11; Psalm 33:12-22



Day of Pentecost

You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. (15:27)

What a day of joy Pentecost is! Many congregations celebrate by wearing red, the color of fire and symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Worship may incorporate dancing and multiple languages. As Jesus promises the coming of the Spirit to all, I picture him with a huge smile.

In the Greek used by John, the evangelist, Jesus introduces the Spirit of truth with the word *parakletos*, meaning Advocate, counselor, guide, helper. The Spirit of truth, says Jesus, aware that his death is imminent, will “guide you into all truth” (16:13). Whatever would happen to the flesh-and-blood Jesus, the Holy Spirit would be his disciples’ constant companion—and ours.

We can’t keep this news to ourselves! Would you keep the news of a child’s birth to yourself? No! With the coming of the Spirit, the church is birthed as a new reality of love and peace. We are called to testify in all that we do to the joyful news that the Spirit of truth is among us—our Advocate, counselor, helper, and guide. Alleluia!

Spirit of truth, thank you for being our guide to God’s truths for this world. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Professional counselors and helpers

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27

Jesus and me?

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (v. 7)

The congregation where I had grown up asked me to preach for its one hundredth anniversary. I love this church. When I preached, I talked about how being a community in Christ had carried us through times of challenge and celebration. I said that we are bound together as Jesus’ body to love, serve, and grow in grace. Then the choir sang a closing song. Though surely it was well-intentioned, the message proclaimed in the anthem was that, after all, it’s just Jesus and me.

That’s the temptation, isn’t it—Jesus and me? “If I could reduce my life in Christ to the two of us,” we think, “things would be easier.” Then perhaps we slide to another thought: “I must be closer to Jesus than others.” Oops. Paul wrote to a gathering of Jesus’ followers who were arguing about the gifts of the Spirit—who had them, who didn’t, and which gifts were better than others. It was to them that he proclaimed that each of us is given the Spirit for the good of the entire community. It’s *not* Jesus and me. It’s Jesus and all of us!

Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of your Spirit, which binds us together for the benefit of all. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who are lonely

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Joel 2:18-29

A body divided

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it. (v. 26)

Paul proclaims that our baptism makes us part of one body—Christ's. The metaphor is elegant: The body of Christ can be understood like our physical bodies. All parts work together for the “common good” (v. 7) and are vital to each other. In fact, Paul says, parts we might not consider strong or presentable or impressive, we must honor and care for.

We often think of a “member” as someone in our congregation who is “in,” compared to those who are “unchurched” or have not joined our congregation. But the Greek word translated “member” also means “limb” or “part.” Paul writes about limbs and eyes and even weaker body parts as valuable and integral to one another.

Jesus says in Mark 3:25 that a house divided against itself cannot stand. True too of bodies, such as if the immune system misperceives part of the body as infectious and attacks it. When we create divisions in the body of Christ, we all suffer together.

Christ calls us instead to thrive together as his body, united for the sake of the world.

Christ Jesus, help us honor and value everyone as integral parts of your body. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who are excluded

Genesis 11:1-9; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Locked in fear

As the Father has sent me, so I send you. (v. 21)

As I write, I'm sheltering at home for fear of the COVID-19. I'm scared I'll get it, scared I'll give it. I stand on my balcony and look out over a city where people are “locked” in their homes as I am. In time, analysts will help us understand the effects of our sheltered lives on our hearts and minds. Fear is an awful companion when the doors are locked.

The disciples huddled together as Easter evening came. They had locked the doors of their hiding place because they were scared of being arrested and killed. But their fear and those locks didn't stop Jesus. The text says simply that he “came and stood among them” (v. 19). And he brought gifts. He breathed peace on them and announced a mission for them. Jesus sent them just as he had been sent. Both gifts freed them to unlock the doors and go.

“So I send you” was meant for us too. If it is not safe for us to go physically, we can love our neighbors through phone calls or email, letters written or groceries ordered for someone. Fear need not be our sheltering companion. Our true companions are peace and mission in Jesus' name.

Jesus our Christ, invade our fears with your peace. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those living with anxiety

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Ezekiel 37:1-14

Condemnation?

[We] walk not according to the flesh
but according to the Spirit. (v. 4)

“There is . . . no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (v. 1). *What?* We’re not condemned? That’s not what I was taught growing up when the fourth-century concept of “original sin” was emphasized in my faith tradition.

What does “those who are in Christ Jesus” mean? Only people who meet certain criteria? No, it means *everyone*: “God so loved the *world* that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16), and “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set [us] free from the law of sin and of death” (v. 2). These first verses of our reading could inspire us for the rest of our lives. But there’s more!

Because of Christ, we are now called and reminded to “walk . . . according to the Spirit.” Life and peace are our guides. We strive to love our neighbors as ourselves without exception. We set aside social structures that condemn some and empower others. We follow Jesus’ way of the cross—of self-giving. For the Spirit is our reality. Amen.

**Almighty God, help us set and reset our minds
on the things of the Spirit, through Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who feel condemned by God

Psalm 29; Isaiah 1:1-4, 16-20

Living with the Spirit

[God] will give life . . . through his Spirit
that dwells in you. (v. 11)

My husband Tim is living with dementia. We talk about it, and name it to others. Some think we shouldn’t. I recall how some in earlier generations called cancer “The Big C” and didn’t like to name it to their sick loved ones: “We don’t want them to know,” they whispered. But often those who are sick do know, deep down inside. Tim, for instance, knows that his brain is changing. Naming this reality lets others accompany us as he slips and slides away.

And know this: Tim is *living* with dementia. The Spirit of the living God falls afresh on him every day. Tim’s love and joy, kindness and generosity, silliness and thoughtfulness bless us. So too his faithfulness. Gathering for worship is bewildering for him, but his face glows when he receives the body and blood of Christ. He pauses to celebrate, and friends around him bask in his joy. We can see that the Spirit of God dwells in him, dementia and all, and we rejoice.

I rejoice too that the Spirit of God dwells in you.

**Holy God, who raised Christ from the dead,
help us celebrate your Spirit in all of your children. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Caregivers and care receivers

Psalm 29; Isaiah 2:1-5, 16-20

God's voice

**The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders. (v. 3)**

I am certain I heard the voice of God whispering to me one day. I was walking through the woods and complaining about the ineffectiveness—in my humble opinion—of a colleague's ministry. I just couldn't let it go, like a dog hunkered over a bone. Then God's voice intervened. I wish it had said, "You're so right. You'd better do something about this." But it didn't. Instead it whispered, "Leave him alone." What? The whisper came again: "Leave him alone." Relief swept over me. I could unclench my teeth and let go.

Have you ever sensed God speaking to you? Was the message more along the lines of "Well done, good and trustworthy servant"? I hope so. But whatever the message, we do want God's voice to be part of our lives. While the people of Israel listened for God's voice in the tumult of a storm, we hear it invading the anxiety and injustice of our time. God's voice can whisper or thunder. Be still and listen. Know relief. God is here.

**Listening and speaking God, thank you for hearing us
and being the voice of peace for our troubled minds. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Disaster relief workers

Isaiah 5:15-24; John 15:18-20, 26-27



The Holy Trinity

**A Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews . . .
came to Jesus by night. (vv. 1-2)**

I'm jealous. I wish I could have shown up where Jesus was staying and had a discussion with him about God, the universe, and other things. I am certain I would have understood everything! Well, maybe not so much.

I do think Jesus wanted to enlighten Nicodemus, who had traveled through Jerusalem's streets by night to see him. Equally, I believe that Jesus wanted to be in relationship with this Pharisee, as he does with all of us. Had I been there, I imagine I too would have cried out in amazement, "How can these things be?" (v. 9). And with Nicodemus, I would emerge changed by this conversation with my rabbi and friend.

Our relationship with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is at the center of our lives, though the mystery of the Trinity surely boggles our brains. What is key is that God loves Nicodemus and us. The God who created, redeemed, and sanctifies us invites us into relationship as Jesus did Nicodemus, shining light on our unknowing.

**Interwoven Trinity, thank you for drawing me
into your dance of love and light. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Teachers of theology

Psalm 29; Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 8:12-17

Visit of Mary to Elizabeth

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (v. 41)

The newly pregnant Mary took a three- or four-day trip to be with Elizabeth, her relative. At Mary's arrival, Elizabeth's own pregnant belly wriggled with joy, for with Mary came the tiny bit of life who would be revealed as the Messiah. Elizabeth was filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit. Two Spirit-led women, one suspiciously pregnant, another who had been shamed by barrenness, were being used by God to turn the world upside down: Elizabeth's son would prepare the way for the Son of God who was growing in Mary's womb.

It's easy to think that the only role of these two women was to be a place of nurture for two cells to grow into billions. But there is more. Elizabeth was a prophet. She recognized that the child Mary was carrying was her Lord. She was also a blessing-giver, who praised Mary's trust in Gabriel's message and who proclaimed eternal blessing for Mary and Jesus.

These two women waited together for the birth of hope that their sons would bring.

Faithful God, may we too be Spirit-led and carry the hope of Jesus wherever we go. In his name we pray. Amen.

Prayer concern: Families anticipating childbirth

1 Samuel 2:1-10; Psalm 113; Romans 12:9-16b

A new way to receive daily devotions

Spread the word to your friends and family members! *Christ in Our Home* is now available for purchase each quarter for Kindle, Nook, Apple Books, Google Play Books, Kobo reader, and other electronic readers. Purchase and download from the appropriate eBook store for the reading device.