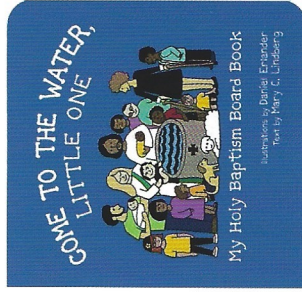


Come to the Water, Little One

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 augsburgfortress.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.

God's wisdom

**I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God
to you in lofty words or wisdom. (v. 1)**

When I was little, a family friend was lovingly referred to as "Sam the Junkyard Man." On his property, vast quantities of machine parts filled a long, domed shed. When Dad needed an obscure part, I'd tag along to Sam's to search. Invariably I too came away with some treasure.

Often that treasure was a bit of wisdom learned, like when Sam taught me how to estimate (quite accurately, I would add) how much daylight remains. Sam showed me how to hold my flat hand out as far as I could, palm facing me, with my forefinger just under the edge of the sun. Each digit is a quarter hour of sunlight remaining. Since I had much smaller hands than Sam's thick mitts, I've always kept just a little space between the fingers. I've used this wisdom on countless occasions in my life, which is more than I've used some things I learned in school! It got me home safely before dark and kept me out of trouble. How Sam taught was probably how faith is best spread—simply and quietly.

**Jesus, help me to spread the wisdom of faith
in simple words and gentle deeds. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Teachers and learners

Exodus 25:1-22; Psalm 20

Reflecting Christ's light

Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket . . . and not on the lampstand? (v. 21)

Have you ever wondered what Jesus would think of the taboo against discussing religion or politics in polite company? Based on this chapter of Mark's gospel, I would guess probably not much. Jesus' words of challenge here follow four rapid-fire parables he taught in what seems to have been a bit of an exasperated tone.

In the US, the separation of church and state enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution has often been misinterpreted to mean that our faith shouldn't affect our politics. (The "establishment clause" protects religions, especially minority ones, from government interference and favoritism.) If Christ shines within us, discipleship is the reflecting of that light into the world's many dark places. The faith we know, the God we love, the discipleship we practice—this light can and should shine brightly in all aspects of our lives and should inform all our decisions, including political ones. We have endless opportunity to practice faith!

Jesus, let our belief become action to reflect your light in all that we say and do. Amen.

Prayer concern: All who serve in elected office

Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 20

Living as if the end is near

The end of all things is near; therefore . . . maintain constant love for one another. (vv. 7-8)

When friends have died unexpectedly, I've often wondered how knowing that day would be their last might have changed how they lived it. Most of us would probably do less crabbing at the people we love. Maybe we'd get our affairs in order or wear socks without holes if we knew we would be toes-up in an emergency room. Maybe, as legend has it that Martin Luther said, we'd plant a tree.

People of faith have always been called to live in the knowledge that life is precious, that each day should be lived as if it were our last. I appreciate the reminder from this text to "maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins" (v. 8). We are sure to err every day, including on our last. But love—specifically God's love—makes each day a fresh start. Let us live each day for the gift that it is.

God, whatever each day brings, help us live it with gratitude and in love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those facing the end of their days

Psalm 130; Isaiah 28:9-13

In heights and depths

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.
Lord, hear my voice! (vv. 1-2)

We can be traversing through life so happily when one unexpected event makes us feel like we stepped off a cliff. At a point in my life when prayer was hard, I kept coming back to this psalm because no words were coming to me. I had been blindsided by an event that made my soul ache. When I read the words of the psalmist, I thought, “Yup, there I am.” Reading it reminded me that the faithful have always cried out to heaven for assurance and hope during difficult times.

I love how the psalms—likely used originally for individual and corporate worship—don’t hold back. If you’ve experienced an emotion, there’s a psalm for that. Hatred, anger, joy, fear, anxiety—none of them are sugar-coated in the psalms. Can you tell what the writer of Psalm 130 was feeling? As in life, it wasn’t one straightforward emotion: despair, humility, and hope are in these words. What range of emotions will you feel today? How will you express them to God?

God, in all things, help us look to you for hope. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who are struggling with life’s challenges

Deuteronomy 1:34-40; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

Just add manure

Some [seed] fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold. (v. 8)

The parable of the sower reminds me of moving to Phoenix, Arizona, for my first pastoral call and trying—and failing—to start a garden in my desert yard. I’ve learned about good dirt since then. Later, when we moved to the wetter midwestern United States, we built a compost bin. I’m amazed at how you can throw rotting food, paper bits, coffee grounds, and even manure in, turn it over, and over time it becomes rich, black dirt.

It’s easy to read this parable and try to categorize people as good soil or trampled, rocky, or thorny ground. But more likely, we are all a combination of all those things. At different moments, we are receptive to God’s word and bear fruits of faith—reflecting God’s love to others, feeding the sheep, seeking the lost, and so on. But God doesn’t give up on us when we are rocky or thorny. I am convinced that the messiness and manure of our lives can actually, in time and with God’s help, turn into the best soil.

Jesus, turn my challenges into fertile soil so I may receive your word and produce good fruit. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those whose work contributes to the food supply

Genesis 2:4b-14; Psalm 130



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 10

**If a house is divided against itself,
that house will not be able to stand. (v. 25)**

Jesus often said abrasive things that we know were not universally appreciated. In the reading for today, he doesn't seem to hold back.

As a pastor and as a Christian, I try to follow Jesus' example of not being afraid to say things that may be difficult to hear. Too often people consider worship as only a time to be comforted, and pastors as only bearers of niceties. But our faith should also challenge us, perhaps sometimes even shock us. Preaching and discipleship should include saying—and doing—the hard things that align us with the breaking-in of the kingdom of God.

It's no small challenge; if people don't like what they hear, they sometimes leave the church and don't come back. But it is our worthwhile endeavor as people of faith to discern a path through a complicated world together.

**God, grant me courage and faithfulness when called
to say and do difficult things. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Those who have
experienced discrimination*

Genesis 3:8-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1

Holding on to hope

**Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the earth. (v. 12)**

I've noticed that when I listen to a song while walking or running, the music changes my cadence. As if part of a cosmic marching band, I fall into step. It's no wonder that something like Psalm 74, likely written for private or public worship, can similarly change the cadence of our thoughts. Though psalms that express frustration, lament, and anger aren't always easy to read, they certainly remain relevant. They invite an open assessment of our own feelings regarding the world and events around us.

This psalm is a collective cry for help amid difficult events. It asks God to remember the people after destruction, then recalls God's saving history, and finally lands firmly on hope for the future. In difficult times, this psalm can help change the cadence of our thoughts as we too remember God's saving promises and are filled with hope and courage for what lies ahead.

**God, even when the world seems fraught with destruction,
fill us with your hope. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who have lost hope

1 Samuel 16:14-23; Revelation 20:1-6

Holy trouble

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him,
"Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" (v. 17)

With my parents' cautious blessing when I was fourteen, I began a search for my biological family. Though I learned in time that my birthmother had died of leukemia a few years after my birth, I found her parents when I was seventeen. What a gift they were for us to know. My grandfather was a Lutheran minister and, as someone recently remarked to me, was a legendary peacemaker. His life and work were a testament to the God of justice; he stood for the underdog and spoke on behalf of the good of humanity. But it often put him at odds with popular opinion and the powers-that-be. As Ahab called the prophet Elijah, he was a "troubler." It was usually difficult to stand up against the tide, but neither Elijah nor my grandfather would be silenced.

Where would the world be without those voices that rise up against the crowd, challenging us to seek a better way?

**God, help us to speak the unpopular, prophetic word,
to be troublemakers in the name of Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who speak difficult truths

Psalm 74; Revelation 20:7-15

A kingdom divided

Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert,
and house falls on house. (v. 17)

Besides equipping people with the instant ability to win an argument with an obscure fact found online, an unintended consequence of the internet and social media is a documented increase in polarization among people. Like propaganda leaflets dropped in twentieth-century wars, an insidious dropping of false information does damage to us as a society. Why? A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.

Of course, we will never be totally unified when it comes to political opinions (or any other opinion, for that matter), but if we are united in God's love, should the rest matter as much? If we fully focus on mutual love and concern for the common good, misinformation disseminated through cyberspace and otherwise will fall on deaf ears. No difference of opinion is more powerful than the strength of God's love. Let us seek to live as God's children and to see the rest of humanity through the eyes of the Creator of us all.

**Gracious God, when we struggle to find common ground,
unite us in your love. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Those working to address
climate change issues*

Psalm 74; Isaiah 26:16-27:1

Mindful of mortals

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? (v. 6)

When I was a child, homes in my neighborhood were filled with older people. There were no kids my age, but I had many playmates. The gentleman next door took me on his walks that always ended at the ice cream shop. On his tar and chip driveway, he'd mention that he must have a hole in his pocket because he'd lost some change. I'd spend hours looking for pennies and dimes he'd dropped intentionally. A neighbor outfitted in an A-line dress, heels, and pearls played catch using bushel baskets and invited me in for cookies and checkers after school. Her husband tossed me in the air when I ran to him.

How their kindness shaped me! From them I learned that the way we treat those we could just as well ignore is a reflection of our faith. We are all just tiny specks of dust existing for a moment on the breeze of the universe, yet we are infinitely loved by our Creator. May we likewise value all the children and vulnerable among us.

Jesus, help us to see and value the young and vulnerable among us as you did. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who mentor children

Genesis 3:14-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15

Barnabas, Apostle

Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (13:3)

The first verse of Acts 13 is a roll call of leaders of the new church in Antioch. It's easy to gloss over a list of names, but there's something worth noting here. Barnabas, who is celebrated on this day, was first encountered in Acts 5: he sold a field and used the proceeds to support the early church. Later he was sent from the church in Jerusalem to Antioch to investigate news that they were welcoming Greeks into what had previously been a Jewish-only band of believers. Indeed he found it to be so and encouraged this new practice.

The other names here reflect an impressive diversity of backgrounds—including skin color, as Simeon's nickname suggests. (*Niger* in Greek would be translated “dark in color” or “black.”)

The ministry of evangelism at its best involves working alongside people from a variety of places, backgrounds, experiences, socioeconomic strata, and languages. For Christ's mission, diversity is strength.

Jesus, help us recognize all people as children of God and rejoice in the diversity of your church in mission. Amen.

Prayer concern: Local evangelism committees

Psalm 112; Isaiah 42:5-12; Matthew 10:7-16

Give thanks always

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

When I visit people who are sick or dying and offer a prayer, I begin with words giving thanks for this day. Someone asked me once why I give thanks for a day that may very well be the last one for the person for whom I am praying. A fair question.

My answer is that I believe each day is a gift filled with promise—specifically, God’s promise. God is faithful through our struggles, our suffering, our life, and our death. Amazing moments of clarity and wonder often happen in the last days of life. For instance, with my father’s last breath, he sat bolt upright with his arms in the air like a toddler wishing to be picked up, despite a traumatic brain injury, paralysis, and a dislocated shoulder. I smile as I imagine who scooped him up on the other side of this life. Yes, it is good to give thanks to the Lord—this and every day.

**God, help us to appreciate each of our days,
beginning to end. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who struggle with pain

2 Kings 14:1-14; Mark 4:1-20



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 11

With what can we compare the kingdom of God . . . ?
It is like a mustard seed. (vv. 30-31)

Fifteen years ago, I wanted to leave parish ministry. Two tough calls had left me so burned out, I felt like I couldn’t even pray. After a half-year break, my bishop asked if I would do a part-time interim. The congregation was feeling burned out too. I agreed to six months.

The church was small. I noticed that people apologized for not being able to have all the programmatic things a big church might have. But I also noticed that what it did, it did well: worship, education, responding to the needs of the community, caring for each other, and caring for the world. When a grandma called me needing help on Christmas Eve day, by worship that night we had gifts, groceries, new bedding, and a plate of cookies for children we’d never met.

Churches don’t need to be big to be faithful. Small churches are a little bit like the mustard seed, germinating faith quietly and helping me keep mine. Fifteen years later, I’m still doing ministry with this dear little church.

**Jesus, inspire us in faith to do small things
with great love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Small churches

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

No distinctions

**For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything;
but a new creation is everything! (v. 15)**

When the early church was figuring out how things should work, the matter of circumcision was one of the big concerns. Since it was required for Jewish boys as infants and for male converts to Judaism, followers of Christ wondered if Gentile converts to Christianity should have to undergo this ritual. But Paul emphasized that righteousness before God comes through Christ, not through anything believers do or don't do. Circumcision would not be required.

What issues now are big concerns that mark some as in and others as out? The work of welcome and justice continues, breaking down the rules that have tiered and ranked God's children as well as false categories of righteousness and unrighteousness. Paul's words still resonate today, reminding us that we are all made equal before God by the cross of Christ.

**May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
be with all people today. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Those who have felt excluded
from the church*

Psalms 52; Ezekiel 31:1-12

God dwells with us

**I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the
Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. (21:22)**

John's vision in Revelation imagines a new experience of God. He describes a city with no night, no gates, not even a temple—no need for a building for worship when living in God's very presence.

I recalled these verses as I shut for the last time the door of the home where I grew up. When my parents were gone, I faced the task of cleaning out the accumulations of two lives and selling the house. A few years after the final closing of that door, I still regularly dream I am back in the house I know like the back of my hand. These frequent dreams remind me that my parents are part of who I am even though they are physically gone. I am happy when my dreams take me home again, to wake feeling like none of it is so far away.

I suspect John's vision gave him a similar feeling and that he wanted to share his experience so all would know that God is near and is coming soon to make all things new. Indeed, God dwells with us now.

**God, help us know you are close,
and that your Spirit dwells with us. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those caring for aging parents

Psalms 52; Jeremiah 21:11-14

Worthy of trust

I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. (v. 8)

“Liar!” I yelled at the TV during a live speech shown on multiple US channels. “No!” I moaned as I read about a beloved religious leader credibly accused of abusive sexual relationships.

Psalm 52 speaks truth to power. It calls out powerful liars, deceivers, and abusers. The psalmist models a better way, saying, “I am like a green olive tree in the house of God” (v. 8). The deceitful leader destroys. Like an olive tree, the psalmist produces good. The deceitful leader, rooted in riches, boasts. Like an olive tree with ancient, nurturing roots, the psalmist is sustained by faith, trusts in God, and gives God thanks and praise.

In our own circle of influence, we can use our power to expose what is wrong and do what is right. We can produce good, build up, and speak out. We can hold ourselves to a faithful standard, taking care with our words and deeds. Trusting in God’s steadfast love, we give God thanks and praise.

**Spirit of God, help me to do right and to right wrong.
In the name of Jesus. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Advocates for justice

Jeremiah 22:1-9; Luke 6:43-45

Farewell and Godspeed

Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left. (v. 1)

A layoff necessitated a new job and a move to a different state. After twenty-three years as members, we were leaving our beloved congregation. When the pastor asked to schedule the Sunday for a “Farewell and Godspeed” blessing, I hesitated. It was a painful time. I wanted to slip out, unnoticed.

“It’s up to you, of course,” she said. “I think, though, it would be good for you and good for the congregation if you did it.” We did, and it was.

Led by the Spirit, Paul begins his final journey to Jerusalem with pastoral visits to encourage and comfort the beloved communities he will not see again.

For the precious and often painful times of saying goodbye, we are blessed with opportunities to encourage and comfort each other. We can help each other leave—and stay—in peace.

O God, help me receive and offer comfort during times of transition. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer concern: People preparing to leave a beloved community

Job 29:1-20; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32

Giving thanks

**O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever. (v. 1)**

Psalm 107 is a liturgy of thanksgiving. In worship, liturgy connects people—"the redeemed of the LORD" (v. 2)—to God and to one another. Liturgy is important. In the English NRSV translation of the Bible, "Give thanks" appears fifty-seven times and "steadfast love," 170 times. Giving God thanks for God's steadfast love is important.

Mindfulness *of* and thankfulness *for* God's steadfast love are spiritual muscles developed with practice. Spiritual exercise is like physical exercise: what seems difficult at first becomes easier, even second nature. It can help to exercise in a way you enjoy. Some ideas: engaging with *Christ in Our Home* or other devotions, participating in Bible study, keeping a gratitude journal, serving others, adding morning or evening prayer to your day, and paying attention to thankfulness and praise during Sunday worship. With praise and thanksgiving, it is important to connect to God and one another.

**O God, your faithful love is with me today and all days.
For this I offer thanks and praise. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Worship planners and planning

Job 29:21–30:15; Acts 21:1-16

Saving grace

**They cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he brought them out from their distress. (v. 28)**

Lightning pierced the sky around the airplane. Turbulence caused erratic dips and lurches. My colleague and I held hands, praying amid fear too deep for words.

Maybe you have experienced a time when you were sick, scared, or worried to death, when you cried out to God in desperation. And maybe, in that fearful time you had a deep experience of God's saving grace and were profoundly thankful.

Psalm 107 tells four versions of a four-part story: a perilous situation, cries or prayers for God's help, God saves, and a call to give God thanks and praise. I worry the formula is too tidy, for even with fervent and faithful prayer there can be tragic death.

Instead of a focus on our acts (prayer) and God's reaction (saving), it may help to focus on God's acts (saving) and our reaction (thanks and praise). In messy, difficult times, may we experience God's steadfast love and saving grace and be moved to give thanks and praise.

**O God, for your steadfast love and saving grace,
I give thanks and praise. In Christ's name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People living in fear

Job 37:1-13; Luke 21:25-28



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 12

**Who then is this, that even the wind
and the sea obey him? (v. 41)**

A life-threatening storm on the sea rightfully terrifies the disciples. Being human, they are powerless to save themselves. Unlike yesterday's passage from Psalm 107, in which people cried to God for help, in this episode the disciples complain to Jesus: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (v. 38). The disciples do not yet recognize Jesus' divine saving power.

Jesus asks, "Have you still no faith?" (v. 40). Is that annoyance we hear in his tone?

Yet fortunately for the disciples and us, Jesus does not require faith to save. Jesus goes ahead and does what only God can do: he talks to water, commanding, "Peace! Be still!" And "the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm" (v. 39). The disciples "were filled with great awe" (v. 41).

Frightening situations can help us recognize the saving power and presence of Jesus. Often it is during life's storms that we can best experience God's awe-inspiring power, peace, and calm.

**Awesome God, thank you for your saving power
and comforting peace. In Christ's name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Lutheran Disaster Response

Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Eat something

**Therefore I urge you to take some food,
for it will help you survive. (v. 34)**

"Here, eat a little something." Such words can be a holy invitation. Making food to nurture, comfort, and encourage can be a holy service. Some holy suppers are brought to a sickbed or to the home of new parents or are served at a funeral lunch.

A violent storm pounded the ship carrying Paul, a prisoner headed to Rome, and 275 others. For days, fear, seasickness, and despair kept them from eating. Without sun or stars to guide them, they saw no way out. As the tempest raged on, they gave up all hope of being saved.

Guided by God's Spirit and following God's plan, Paul knew that everyone sailing with him would live. Just before daybreak on the fourteenth day, Paul urged the others to eat something, saying, "It will help you survive." He then took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to eat. "Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves" (v. 36).

Sometimes eating is an act of faith and hope.

**Sustaining God, in times of despair and fear,
fill me with your peace. For Christ's sake. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Ministries of hospitality and service

Exodus 7:14-24; Psalm 65

All will be saved

And so it was that all were brought safely to land. (v. 44)

As Acts 27 begins, Paul is a prisoner on a large ship headed to Italy. He warns against setting sail (vv. 9-10). Unsurprisingly, the centurion, a Roman army commander, doesn't listen to Paul, a prisoner (v. 11).

For days, a storm pummels the ship. All onboard give up hope of being saved (v. 20). After reminding them, "You should have listened to me" (v. 21), Paul tells them that his God will grant safety to all on the ship with him (v. 24), the ship will run aground and be lost (vv. 22, 26), and to be saved, everyone must stay together (v. 31).

As Paul has predicted, the ship runs aground. As it breaks into pieces, soldiers plan to kill the prisoners before they can escape (v. 42). "But the centurion, wishing to save Paul," stops them (v. 43).

The centurion listened. The centurion trusted Paul and Paul's powerful, saving God. The centurion understood that for some to be saved, all must be saved.

**O God, let my words and actions witness
to your saving grace and love. In Christ's name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Prisoners and prison ministries

Exodus 9:13-35; Psalm 65

There was calm

Then [Jesus] got into the boat with [the disciples]
and the wind ceased. (v. 51)

When our daughter was young, a sudden and terrifying diagnosis rocked us like a boat in a storm. We were emptied of any notion of control or power over the situation. Usually full of self-reliance, we came to realize that this "emptying" gave us the space to recognize the presence and power of God. We were filled with calm.

Perhaps the disciples were in a similar boat. According to Mark, they had not understood the miracle of Jesus feeding more than five thousand people. Maybe the disciples were a little full of themselves. After all, Jesus had told them, "You give [the multitude] something to eat" (v. 37). And they did find the starter meal of five loaves and two fish.

The disciples did not, however, miss the miracle of Jesus walking on water. Perhaps this terrifying and astonishing sight gave them the space to recognize Jesus as God. Jesus gets in the boat with them and the wind ceases. There is calm.

**Thank you, O God, for your comforting presence
and saving power. You are always with me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People living with serious illness

Joshua 10:1-14; Psalm 65

John the Baptist

**If you have any word of exhortation
for the people, give it. (v. 15)**

On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas are in the synagogue. They are invited to offer a “word of exhortation.” Paul rises to speak.

Exhortation suggests an urgent call to action, bold truth-telling, and tough love. As part of Paul’s exhortation, he tells how John the Baptist had urged people to prepare for a savior. Indeed, years before Paul’s ministry, “with many . . . exhortations, [John] proclaimed the good news” (Luke 3:18): “Repent! Do right! Prepare for the Lord!” Today, six months before we celebrate Jesus’ birth, the church observes the lesser festival of John the Baptist. He would approve of the lesser billing (v. 25).

Exhortation is at the heart of preaching the good news of Jesus. The gospel, it is said, comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. The next time a sermon makes you uncomfortable, consider that you may be hearing needed exhortation: Repent! Do right! Love God and your neighbor!

**O God, help me hear and respond to your calls
to repentance and action. In Christ’s name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Bold preachers and leaders

Psalm 141; Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:57-80

Faithful giving

**We want you to excel also
in this generous undertaking. (v. 7)**

Many donors want to designate their giving for a specific use they can see. For example, they want to fund building a church, not pay for heating it. Donors often want to learn how they changed lives.

More is asked of faithful donors. They are asked to trust and give without restriction, to care less about *feeling* good about their giving and more about *doing* good through their gifts. For example, after a disaster, it might feel good to give teddy bears and clothes; it likely does greater good to give money to be used as response teams deem best. Faithful donors learn how people and communities used donations to change their lives.

Paul wants the wealthy in the Corinthian church to contribute to the financially poor church in Jerusalem. He does not want the wealthy to feel superior or the poor to feel shamed. He does not want the church in Jerusalem to feel less-than or beholden. In his invitation to give, Paul teaches faithfulness in giving and receiving.

**Spirit of God, inspire me to generously give as I am able
and to graciously receive as I need. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Generous giving
and gracious receiving*

Psalm 30; Lamentations 2:1-12

Identity and mission

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? . . .
I know who you are, the Holy One of God. (v. 34)

Jesus begins his ministry among the impoverished and oppressed people of Galilee. In his hometown, Nazareth, he claims his identity and mission with a reading from Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, [and] has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. [The Spirit of the Lord] has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and . . . let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18).

Shortly after this, in a Capernaum synagogue, the faithful are astounded and amazed by the authority and power of Jesus. It is a demon, though, who names Jesus as "the Holy One of God." Jesus confirms this identity and affirms his mission by miraculously casting out the demon and freeing the man held captive by it.

In the name of Jesus, "the Holy One of God," we claim our identity and mission. Affirming our baptism, we make promises, including "to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed . . . and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth" (*ELW*, p. 236).

Help and guide me, O God, as I grow in discipleship.
In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer concern: *Dismantling systemic racism*

Psalm 30; Lamentations 2:18-22



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 13

Jairus . . . fell at [Jesus'] feet. . . The woman . . . fell down
before [Jesus]. (vv. 22, 33)

With desperate courage and faithful fear, a father and a woman come to Jesus for healing. The father falls at Jesus' feet and begs. The woman fights the crowd and her social station just to touch Jesus' cloak. There is no pride, no decorum, no well-crafted petition. Each prays with their posture, from their gut, and through their breaking heart.

After Jesus asked aloud, "Who touched my clothes?" (v. 30), the woman approached him "in fear and trembling" and "fell down before him" (v. 33). When their daughter is healed, the father and mother are "overcome with amazement" (v. 42). God's amazing grace and awesome power are fearsome.

It would be easy to reduce these two miracles to faith. After all, Jesus tells the woman, "Your faith has made you well" (v. 34), and tells the man, "Only believe" (v. 36). The healing miracles of Jesus, however, are less about the faith of the healed and more about the God-power and God-authority of Jesus the healer.

O God, for Jesus' sake, hear my petitions for healing. Amen.

Prayer concern: *Prayer ministers and ministries*

Psalm 30; Lamentations 3:22-33; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Faithful and suffering

I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow. (vv. 8-9)

“During the bleak time,” a dear and now-departed friend confided, “I would physically shake my fist at God. It was a comfort to realize being angry at God proved I still believed in God.”

Night and day, our faithful, suffering psalmist prays to God (vv. 1, 9, 13). Still, there is no miraculous healing, no relief.

Friends abandon the psalmist, heaping on misery (vv. 8, 18). It still happens, all too often. It can be fearful and faith-testing to be around someone who doesn’t get better.

If only the psalmist had a friend to lessen the emotional pain so the physical suffering would be easier to bear. If only.

I imagine my friend and the psalmist having a heart-to-heart conversation. My friend says, “I believe you. Your suffering is real. I don’t believe God causes suffering. I believe God is with us in our suffering. I know God loves you.”

**O God, there is so much suffering and despair.
Send your Spirit, send me, to comfort and console. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People with mental illness

Leviticus 21:1-15; 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Peter and Paul, Apostles

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith. (v. 7)

After the death of the first disciples and apostles, including Peter and Paul, whom the church celebrates today, early church leaders struggled with questions about faith, salvation, death, and life—questions like “What did it mean?” Someone stepped up and wrote the biblical books of 1 and 2 Timothy, attributing authorship to Paul. It was common in that era for followers of a key leader to lend the authority of their teacher to their words.

By framing 2 Timothy as Paul’s last words, the writer readies leaders to hear the exhortation to proclaim, convince, rebuke, encourage, and teach (2 Timothy 4:2). Using Paul as a model, the writer encourages church leaders to keep going, keep the faith, and know that God is with them (vv. 7, 17).

Some people write their own obituary, often with humor and humility, to interpret their life, witness to their faith, and encourage others. This too is a way to reflect on questions of “What did it mean?”

O God, may my life be a witness to faith and encouragement for others. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer concern: Congregational leaders

Psalm 87:1-3, 5-7; John 21:15-19; Acts 12:1-11

A perfect response

The father of the child cried out,
"I believe; help my unbelief!" (v. 24)

Jesus, Peter, James, and John return from the transfiguration mountaintop to find the other disciples amid a great crowd and much commotion. Jesus learns that his disciples had tried to heal a boy and failed.

Clearly frustrated with the disciples, Jesus speaks harshly to them. Then he asks to see the boy. The boy's father pleads, "If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us" (v. 22).

Jesus counters, "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes" (v. 23).

The father immediately cries, "I believe; help my unbelief!" Given the slow-to-understand disciples, this perfect response likely surprises and encourages Jesus.

As followers of Jesus, sometimes we fail, and sometimes we get it right. We both disappoint and encourage. Like the father, we cry, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

**O God, I believe; help my unbelief.
In the name of Jesus. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Children and adults with disabilities

2 Kings 20:1-11; Psalm 88

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.