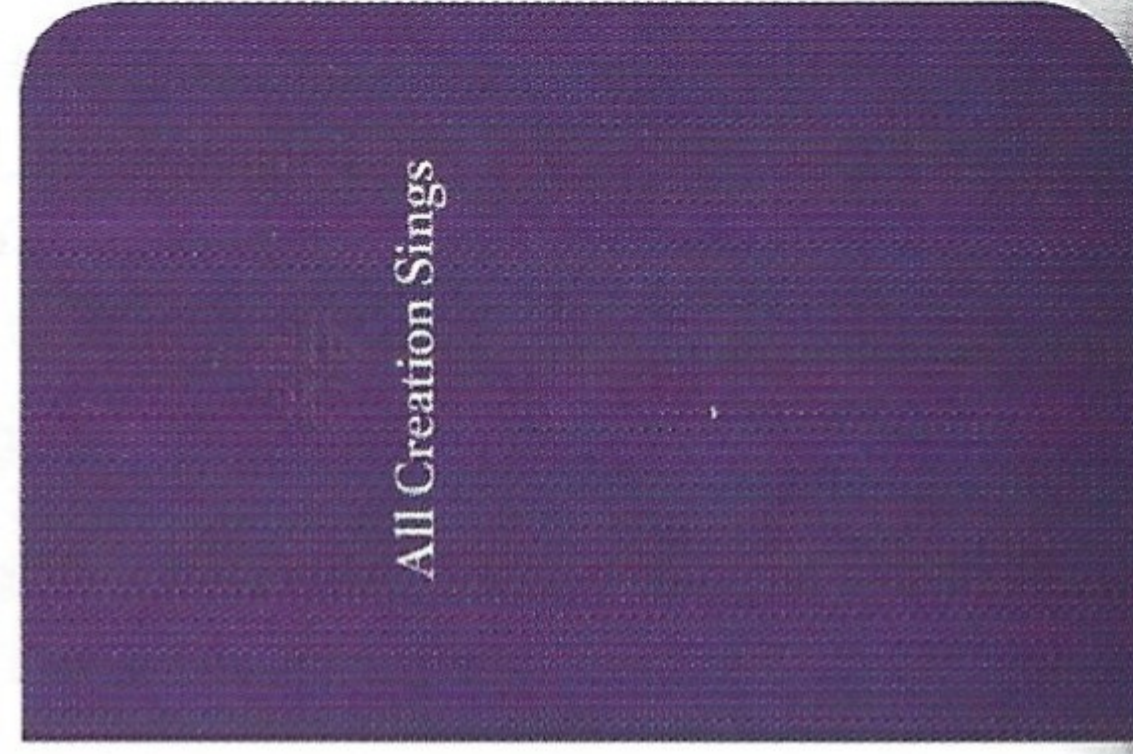



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 AUGSBURG FORTRESS



Christ in Our Home

July, August, September
2021

July, August, September 2021

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

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Prayers

Morning

We bless you, gracious God, for it is your joy to wake us from sleep and breathe hope into our hearts. Come to us in every blessing and challenge this day, that we may share the life you are so pleased to give. Amen.

Evening

Our limbs fall quiet to our sides as daylight fades. But your arms, unwearied, hold us still. We thank you for the grace of the day now done, and for the assurance that your love watches over us until morning comes. Amen.

Mealtime

Feed us, Lord Jesus, with the bread of life as you fed the multitude with meager loaves and fish. And as you filled their hearts with gratitude, may our hearts overflow with thanks that we may joyfully share with all in want. Amen.

Festivals and commemorations

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

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

Writers

July 1–10 Matthew Petersen is the pastoral assistant at the Edge House Lutheran Campus Ministry in Cincinnati, Ohio, and is in formation to be consecrated as a deacon through the Lutheran Diaconal Association. When not running marathons or watching baseball, he and his spouse care for two small dogs, a flock of urban chickens, and a guinea pig.

July 11–20 Ruth Overdier, a semiretired pastor serving Trinity Lutheran Church in Manton, Michigan, lives in Traverse City. She gives thanks for her husband Fred, children and grandchildren, extended family, dear friends, and abundant grace.

July 21–31 Jacqueline Rau is a wife, mother, and pastor. She enjoys bike riding, hiking, and taking long walks with her dog. She and her family reside in Livonia, Michigan, where they are active in the congregation in which she grew up.

August 1–16; Prayer Page (inside front cover) David L. Miller is pastor of faith formation at St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Naperville, Illinois. He and his wife, Dixie, live in Downers Grove, Illinois.

August 17–31 George Carlson, now retired, served his entire pastoral ministry in southern Wisconsin. He and his wife, Solveig, live in Stoughton, Wisconsin, and have three children and six grandchildren. George enjoys serving on the synod Immigration Reform and Refugee Support task team, rooting for the Badgers and Packers, golfing, and gardening.

September 1–15 Louanne Isernhagen and her husband, Glenn, a retired ELCA pastor, are members of St. Philip Lutheran Church in Littleton, Colorado. They have two grown children and five grandchildren. She has worked as a teacher, librarian, and TWA flight attendant. She sews quilts for Lutheran World Relief and writes lots of letters.

continued on next page

September 16–23 Michael Coffey is the pastor of First English Lutheran Church in Austin, Texas. He is the author of *Mystery without Rhyme or Reason: Poetic Reflections on the Revised Common Lectionary* (Wipf & Stock).

September 24–30 Annabelle P. Markey serves as pastor at Community Lutheran Church, Sterling, Virginia. She lives in Sterling with her husband, Jeff, and their Labrador retriever, Hasper. She enjoys travel, dogs, icon writing, singing, hiking, and crafting. She is also deeply drawn to contemplative prayer practices and is in the process of becoming a spiritual director.

Beyond any human image

**As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress . . . (v. 2)**

On the first reading of this psalm I missed it. In verse 2 the psalmist uses both a masculine and a feminine example to describe God. It seems to me that if God were only supposed to be thought of as male, the psalmist would not have been moved to use both masculine and feminine imagery: “master” and “mistress.”

To be honest, I still often picture God as an old white man with a beard. Yet as I have grown, I have also come to appreciate feminine and other metaphors for God. Such images, while still incapable of encompassing all of who God is, give me a fuller understanding of God and of God’s relationship to me and the universe. God is bigger than any pronouns or images with which we attempt to describe God.

**God our parent, open our eyes to your fullness
and your image in all people. In Christ’s name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: LGBTQ ministries

Pay attention!

Look at what is before your eyes. (v. 7)

Lately I've been paying special attention not just to things like deadlines, traffic lights, and people with whom I'm talking, but to little things like the side view of an ant crawling across the cement or the way leaves and branches move in the woods near my house.

For the early Christians known as desert mothers and fathers, the discipline of paying attention known as "practicing the presence of God" was vital to their prayer and community life. Prior to practicing this aspect of prayer myself, I sometimes missed out on aspects of God that were right in front of me.

Today Paul reminds us to notice what is right before us: that we belong to Christ, and so do our neighbors. When we pay attention to and live in confidence that all belong to Christ, it affects what else we pay attention to: what we prioritize, decisions we make, and opportunities to reach out in love to serve others.

**God, open our senses to see that all belong to Christ.
Help us live out of this grace-filled truth. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Entomologists

Thomas, Apostle

Lord, we do not know where you are going.

How can we know the way? (v. 5)

Thomas often gets a bad rap. But is Thomas so different from us? Do we always have a clear sense of where God is leading us? Don't we also search for answers and sometimes even question whether God is present in our lives?

In Western thought and in much of Christian culture there is a sense that certainty or being without doubt is the same as faith. Right belief or adherence to a statement of faith is required in some communities.

The Greek word often translated as "faith" is *pistis*, which can also be understood as trust. Faith, then, can be defined as trust to follow where God leads, even amid our doubts or questions. God desires our trust, not our certainty. A prayer by Thomas Merton that we use at the campus ministry where I serve begins, "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going . . ." and ends, ". . . I will trust you always." God knows that we have questions, and leads us on the way.

God, give us good courage to trust that you are leading us even when we don't know the way. In Christ's name. Amen.

*Prayer concern: College and university
outreach ministries*



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 14

... except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. (v. 5)

Even though Jesus was rejected by his own community and they didn't all believe his teaching, he still healed those who needed healing. The reading for today does not even say specifically that the people Jesus healed had any faith. He does not "shake off the dust that is on [his] feet" (v. 11), as he later tells his disciples to do when they experience rejection. Jesus still heals. This says a lot about God.

God's love is so big and God's care for us so great that God heals even in the face of rejection. There have been times in my life when I was filled with unbelief and even dismissed God. Yet somehow the God of the universe still loved me so much that God reached out to heal and forgive me. This same God continues to grant me grace day after day, and offers it to you too.

God, thank you for healing us with your love even when we struggle to believe. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Young adults who have rejected God

God's power amid my weakness

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (v. 30)

When I entered seminary my self-esteem was pretty low. Even at a young age I knew that God had called me to ministry, but I felt I wasn't good enough to be a faith leader. I dwelled on my weaknesses and was afraid to show them to others I thought were "holier" than me.

In a required practicum called clinical pastoral education, I became more open to my own vulnerabilities and more aware of my core identity as God's child. I came to see that I could not minister effectively to others unless I identified with their pain and weakness in order to help them experience God's presence within it.

Over time I also came to see my weaknesses as a gift that helped me more empathetically travel with others in their weaknesses. Through the power of the Holy Spirit I have grown—and continue to grow—into my call to be a faith leader. God calls ministers to be vulnerable with others, to create space for others to be vulnerable, and to encourage all to be open to God's power at work within us.

Guide us through our weaknesses, God, so we may journey with others in theirs and sense your power in our lives. Amen.

Prayer concern: New seminarians and faith leaders

Patience and endurance

**Be patient, therefore, beloved,
until the coming of the Lord. (v. 7)**

In my part of the world spring tends to take a long time coming. Long after Christmas and bright, fresh snowfalls, the sky and land are often still a dingy gray. Multiple days can pass without sun. My eyes ache for green sprouts and a break in the clouds.

In today's reading James speaks of patience. I certainly need patience on late winter days. Later the author also speaks of endurance. As a marathon runner I appreciate James's encouragement to look to the example of others—the prophets of old—like runners who have crossed the finish line and serve as assurance that I can too.

As we face personal struggles, as we cry out for justice throughout society, where presently we so often “grumble against one another” (v. 9), and as we long for God's healing presence—we are called to patience and endurance. James assures us we can be strong, for “the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (v. 11) and his coming is near. Like spring, it will come.

**Faithful Lord Jesus, remind us that you are alongside us
even as we await your coming. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those waiting and working for justice

The right time

My time has not yet come. (v. 6)

I've learned in over ten years of being married that just because I want to talk about something or share some frustration, that doesn't mean it's the right time to do so. Am I in the right mindset? Is my spouse in the right mindset to hear me? Are we just about to leave for work, so there won't be enough time to process everything and it might ruin the morning? What I want to say or express may have value and may need to be said, but it may not be the right time.

Thinking that now would be a great time for Jesus to reveal himself to a wider audience—if, in fact, he is who he claims to be (v. 5)—his brothers urge him to travel with them to Jerusalem. Jesus knows that what he has to say is necessary and important, but it is not yet the right time.

Discernment is crucial, especially when we have something important to say or do. This is true not only in committed relationships, but in other areas of life as well. Thanks be to God that the Holy Spirit's guidance is available to help us discern what to do—and when.

**God of wisdom, guide us with discernment
to know when to speak or act. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Couples in counseling

Faithful justice

**Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky. (v. 11)**

Last summer I participated in marches and events for racial justice after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. At one of the first marches I walked alongside young families, seasoned activists, bikers, and a college student from the campus ministry I serve. I saw people of differing races, ages, and life circumstances. Some expressed that they were there in response to what they understood as God's call for justice. I felt the same.

Sometimes the prophetic voices for justice and peace come from the ground up, not from the top down. We hear the Holy Spirit groaning from the streets rather than from pulpits or podiums. Throughout history—from the cries of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt to the cries of people of color today—God has heard these voices. Indeed, God is at work among them, causing faithfulness to spring up like verdant shoots from crumbling concrete, and making righteousness shine across the land.

**God of justice, bend our ear to the faithful voices
rising from our streets, and move us to join them. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who speak truth to power

Gracious, but not always nice

**Let your speech always be gracious,
seasoned with salt. (v. 6)**

Growing up in the Upper Midwest I was taught from a young age that niceness was a desirable character trait. My four-year-old niece has learned to understand the word *respect* as having to do with “being nice.”

Should we strive to always be nice to others? Well, yes and no. Sometimes our desire to be nice to others does harm. Niceness can sometimes be an excuse not to challenge racism and systems of white privilege. Niceness might cause someone to not assert themselves against a person intent on doing harm. Niceness has led me to avoid confronting a relative's anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant speech. Niceness can protect the status quo to the detriment of people who are marginalized and oppressed.

The writer of Colossians calls us to gracious speech—speech that may be seasoned with some salty language from time to time. Our speech should always extend the work of God's grace. Sometimes that means *not* being “nice.”

**God of grace, give us courage to speak up for the ways
of your grace, even when it means not being nice. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: People engaged in courageous
conversations today*

The melody of mercy

He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors. (v. 72)

When I was in seminary, attending chapel during the week was one of my spiritual practices. Reflecting on these services now, I still hear the bubbling of the baptismal font, picture the light through the stained-glass windows, and taste the communion bread placed in my hands by my professors.

At chapel, congregational and liturgical singing was deeply meaningful to me. It felt like home to hold the familiar worship book and sing hymns and liturgy I had sung and heard since I was a child. I distinctly remember the voice of one of my classmates singing the “Benedictus,” Zechariah’s song in today’s gospel reading.

Hymnody and liturgy, rooted in scripture, connect us not only to God but to others throughout history and around the world. The holy melody of God’s promises is sung from Abraham and Sarah to Elizabeth and Zechariah, and from my grandmother, who sang in her rural church choir, to me singing in the seminary chapel. The music of the church invites all—across time, space, race, gender, and all other human categories—into the sacred song.

God of all, we give thanks for the gifts of scripture, hymnody, and liturgy. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Prayer concern: Worship planners



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 15

[Herod] said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” (v. 16)

This scene in Mark’s gospel is grisly: The king gives a banquet for his male friends. A pretty, young girl (the king’s stepdaughter!) pleases them with her dancing. Drunk with power as well as with wine, the king promises the girl whatever she asks—and finds himself trapped into murdering a prophet.

Herod had actually been drawn to John. But he wasn’t willing to risk either embarrassment before his guests or the anger of his wife. It was more important to keep his foolish promise, to preserve his personal pride, than to save John.

People were comparing Jesus to various prophets of the past. But Herod said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” Herod was really saying more than he knew. Even in death John points to Jesus.

John had spoken of Jesus, who would be greater than he. Jesus would embody God’s truth, God’s own self. In his life, death, and rising, not only does Jesus *tell* good news: Jesus *is* good news.

Dear God, we live in a broken world. Help us remember that your truth is stronger than evil and death. Amen.

Prayer concern: World leaders and decision makers

Good trouble

They seized [Paul], shouting, “. . . This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place.” (vv. 27-28)

This little piece of scripture fits into the big story about the apostle Paul’s adventures and his passionate gospel witness. The uproar here concerns religious beliefs. The crowd was incensed, believing that Paul was preaching against cherished convictions and traditions.

John Lewis, who died last July 17, is remembered as a statesman and civil rights leader. He organized peaceful sit-ins and protests to support voting rights and racial equality. Dedicated to nonviolence, he courageously endured much suffering. He was arrested at least forty-five times and often brutally beaten. Lewis believed it was sometimes necessary to engage in “good trouble” to achieve change.

Paul and John Lewis are separated by centuries but united in passion and purpose. They join a crowd of saints and witnesses of every generation. We may not all be called to be activists in the same way, but we can pray that God empower us all to act boldly for justice and peace.

Holy God, help us discern when change is needed, and give us courage to act in your name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Journalists and other prophetic voices

Unexpected helpers

Now the son of Paul’s sister heard about the ambush. (v. 16)

Tucked into this dramatic account of arrest and ambush is an intriguing reference: the apostle Paul had a sister and a nephew! Who knew? Scripture tells us nothing else about either of them, but we might speculate that their relationship with Paul was close and affirming. In any case, this nephew was instrumental in keeping Paul safe. Are we to imagine that he felt some admiration for Paul’s courageous gospel witness?

A government official called the “tribune” also played a part. He listened respectfully to the report of this young man, and he arranged for Paul to be sent safely to Felix, the governor.

God uses people—public officials and youth, family and friends—to accomplish God’s will and purposes. Perhaps many of us live “between the lines” rather than in the headlines. Yet we can be sure that as we are faithful, God uses each of us in ways we may never know.

Guide my ways, dear God. Help me to be open to your leading day by day. Amen.

Prayer concern: Safety for those who are incarcerated

A cry for help

When my spirit is faint, you know my way. (v. 3)

A note in my Bible attributes this psalm to “David, when he was in the cave,” pointing to a time when he was fleeing for his life. Whether or not this psalm is actually linked to that setting and episode, it expresses the heart-cry of anyone who is in distress. “Persecutors” might be physical dangers. They could also represent troubling thoughts like anger, regret, anxiety, despair, doubt, or grief. Does this psalm speak to you today?

Or perhaps for you this is a day of gladness—a comfortable, hope-filled time in your life. If so, you might read this psalm through the eyes of one who is in trouble—a family member, a friend. You might pray this psalm for a refugee seeking asylum at a border crossing.

Psalm 142 represents the honest expression and desperation of one who pours out a complaint. It’s a call for help. In that sense, it’s a prayer of faith. We, like the psalm writer, are encouraged to trust in God, who hears and understands.

**God our defender, strengthen our faith to trust
in your mercy and help. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People in danger

Where we see God

He is the image of the invisible God. (v. 15)

I admire gifted authors of novels, poetry, hymns. Often their words express for me a feeling or a truth. In this letter to first-century Christians, the author of Colossians uses words from an early hymn as he struggles to articulate the wonder of the “invisible God.” Indeed, we cannot see God with our eyes, yet we know God through Jesus. Words and phrases are heaped upon each other, extolling Jesus as Lord over heaven and earth, over everything in all creation—even over death. In him “all things hold together” (v. 17). Finally, as if out of breath, the writer exclaims: “In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (v. 19). Extravagant praise!

In what seems to me a similar way, contemporary hymnist Brian Wren gathers the wonder of how we see the invisible God in Jesus’ sacrificial love. In Wren’s hymn “Great God, your love has called us” (ELW 358), we sing:

We strain to glimpse your mercy seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

**God, thank you that in Jesus you reveal the fullness
of your majesty and love—in self-giving service. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Authors, poets, and hymn writers

Precious words

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil; for you are with me. (v. 4)**

What a beloved psalm! It's been chanted, sung, and prayed by countless generations, through thousands of years. Perhaps you know this psalm by heart. Maybe someone helped you memorize it as a child, the way my mother taught it to me.

In the last few moments before emergency surgery, I closed my eyes and prayed this psalm. In the days before my friend Tom's death, he asked me to say the psalm for him again and again. The verse quoted above, which many know in the King James Version—"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death"—can also be translated "valley of dark shadows." We all have shadowy-valley times of feeling lonely, despondent, afraid. At such times this psalm can give us courage. We are invited to pray with the psalmist: "I fear no evil; for you are with me."

Evil is real, and we may feel afraid—after all, we're human. But the four small words "you are with me" are precious! They assure us we are not alone. The Lord, our Shepherd, is with us always.

**Dear caring Shepherd, when we are afraid, help us trust
that you hold us in your love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Hospital chaplains

Praying for mercy

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! (v. 38)

"What do you want me to do for you?" Fred's doctor asked. His vision was failing. Dr. Petra had examined his eyes and offered several options. "I want to see, to be able to read!" he answered without hesitation. So she, a skilled physician, made the necessary arrangements, performed retina surgery, and restored a measure of sight to my grateful husband.

A blind man sat by the road, begging. In that day and age there wasn't much more for a person with a disability to do. But this man had heard of Jesus. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" he shouted. The man knew what he needed and was bold to ask: "Lord, let me see again" (v. 41). He was absolutely convinced that Jesus had power to heal him.

"Lord, have mercy!" we pray in worship when we sing or speak the Kyrie (*ELW*, p. 98). It can be our personal petition as well—our heartfelt prayer in times of need. We can pray for mercy for healing, for the church, for the world, for the good creation. We need not be afraid to ask. Indeed, Jesus invites us: "What do you want me to do for you?" (v. 41).

**In peace we pray to you: help, save, comfort,
and defend us, gracious Lord. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Ophthalmologists



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 16

**Come away to a deserted place
all by yourselves and rest a while. (v. 31)**

The disciples followed Jesus' directive and got into the boat to get away from the crowds, the commotion, for they'd "had no leisure even to eat" (v. 31). Jesus knew the need for renewal of body and spirit, mind and heart. Often he went to a place alone to pray. Jesus understood the disciples' need to recharge, as we say.

But when they got to the other side of the lake, they were met again by throngs of people. And despite whatever fatigue he himself felt, Jesus "had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (v. 34).

How about you? Do you sometimes find yourself overextended, impatient with interruptions, or just weary? You've found a quiet space now, a brief time to reflect, to pray. In a little while you'll go back to your ministry of daily life. Even as Jesus led you to this time of rest, he goes back with you into your work. As he did for his disciples and the crowds, he will shepherd you.

**Jesus, as we struggle with problems in our
ever-changing world, grant us your peace. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People who feel stressed

Community of faith

**Obey your leaders and submit to them,
for they are keeping watch over your souls. (v. 17)**

Obey. Submit. These sound like heavy "law" words. Yet the leaders mentioned here are in fact spiritual guides.

In preparation for Affirmation of Baptism, my grandson Eric was asked to create a personal faith statement. At the end of his reflection, Eric wrote:

"I want to thank this church and its members. Throughout almost my whole life this church has helped me learn so much about my religion and how to grow closer to God. I am also especially thankful for my mentor, Chris, for helping me see things in different and new ways and helping to explain stories and concepts from the Bible so they made sense. Lastly, I want to thank my family for guiding me through my confirmation and making it possible for me to be part of this wonderful community."

What a blessing it is for individuals and families when mentors and others in a congregation graciously guide them in their faith journey. What a blessing to the faith community when learners respond with gladness and thanks.

**Holy Spirit, inspire leaders to proclaim your truth
and to lead in love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Faith teachers and mentors

God of abundance

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts
with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. (v. 4)

Our psalm for today brings back childhood memories of Sunday school. Our teachers created a “harvest display” of corn stalks, pumpkins, colorful autumn leaves, and other fruits and vegetables from nature’s bounty. We read this psalm together in our worship time.

Much later in life, I learned a new hymn that takes its cue from Psalm 100:

Praise and thanksgiving be to God our maker,
source of all blessing, prodigal creator
(ELW 458).

I always thought *prodigal* meant “wasteful.” That, after all, is the name often attributed to the younger son in Jesus’ parable, who “squandered his property in dissolute living” (Luke 15:13). But this hymn reminds us that our *God* is prodigal—in the sense of “lavish” or “extravagant.” The whole creation teems with astonishing abundance and beauty.

Our psalm calls us to enter God’s courts to respond in joyous worship. Indeed, our prodigal Creator is worthy of our prodigal thanksgiving and praise.

**Bountiful Creator, with a thankful heart
I sing your praise. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Farmers and gardeners

God, overjoyed

When he has found [the lost sheep],
he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. (v. 5)

Again! Our four-year-old son had a habit of wandering off. We had warned him many times that one day he would get lost. We were at a large historical park, and just as we noticed he was missing, it started pouring down rain. I cried tears of frustration as we searched. Why couldn’t he stay with us? Thankfully we found him chatting away with a security guard. He gave me a big hug and said, “I was scared!” It took all I had not to say, “I told you so!”

A good shepherd works hard to care for the sheep. They steer other animals away and scout out rich green grass for the sheep to graze. They prod and direct to keep the sheep together as a flock. So when one wanders off, it is no doubt frustrating. Yet our God does not dwell on frustration when we ignore warnings, wander, and get lost. God is so overjoyed when we, guided by the Holy Spirit, repent and return to the fold that God invites *everyone* to join in celebration (vv. 6-7).

**Thank you for never ceasing to beckon us to draw closer
to you, God. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Parents of young children

Mary Magdalene, Apostle

His sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women . . . ?" (v. 7)

We live in a state surrounded by large lakes. One of my favorite summer getaways is to visit one of the lakes. I picture running up and down the sand dunes, trolling for minnows, and enjoying the many beach activities.

The banks of the Nile certainly didn't bring up fond memories for the Israelites. Pharaoh's order to drown baby boys in the river only led to fear and dread. But some refused to give in to fear. Moses' mother hid her baby in her home, then among the reeds in the water. I imagine her sneaking down to nurse him during the day. Once Pharaoh's daughter found him, Moses' sister boldly offered to fetch the baby's own mother to be his nurse! God used ordinary people in an extraordinary situation to bring about God's plan.

God used another ordinary person, Mary Magdalene, whom the church remembers today, as the first to bear witness to the empty tomb. God uses ordinary people in extraordinary situations each and every day. Be assured that God is using you in important ways too.

**Gracious God, we sometimes doubt our significance.
Help us trust you to use us for good. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Children waiting to be adopted

From the inside out

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. (v. 16)

My son's sixth-grade science teacher *loved* science. While you might expect this, she went above and beyond: always encouraging science, telling us about science-related things to do over holiday breaks, and giving us simple experiments to do at home. She used a hands-on approach in the classroom, with kids spending lots of time on experiments and visual demonstrations. My son particularly liked the unit on foods. He loved to tell us how the body uses different foods for nourishment. I enjoyed it too, as I had forgotten much of it from my own school days.

The Holy Spirit can use the word of God to nourish our entire being so that it is not simply "in one ear and out the other" but changes us from the inside out. Whenever you encounter the word, whether written or oral, ask the Spirit to use it to nourish your soul, to change you from the inside out. For it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the good word is transformed into good fruit.

**Let the word of God dwell richly in us.
In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Teachers and school administrators

Rise up

**The LORD upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down. (v. 14)**

You've probably seen a similar story: A high school runner is competing in an important race. She finishes the race and steps aside to watch the rest of her team do the same. A runner from a different team collapses a few feet from the finish line. The first runner sees what has happened and goes to help. She helps the downed runner complete the race by propping her up on her shoulder. Sadly, both runners are disqualified as the rules don't allow for a runner to receive or give help.

Life isn't always easy. Sometimes we fall down: we lose a job, we are hurt by a friend, we collapse inches from the finish line. And we don't think we will ever get back up again. Things seem so bad, so impossible, that we feel like giving up. But God holds us. God raises us up. Not bound by the rules of high school sports, God is able to lift us out of any situation we find ourselves in. That is something we can trust!

**In tough situations, help us trust you, Lord, to raise us up
and uphold us. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: School athletics coaches

**Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 17**

**Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not
buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." (v. 7)**

I remember holiday meals when I was a kid. My mom brought out all the specialties: the secret-recipe stuffing, the decadent sweet-potato casserole, the creamy macaroni and cheese. Some years she even made a few appetizers to get us started. Not only was it good, but there was plenty of it. My mom cooked as if we were having a large family gathering even when it was only four of us! There was always enough for seconds and for a snack later. One year I asked if my new boyfriend could join us. My mom's first response was, "What if we don't have enough?" I remember thinking, "Seriously?!"

Sometimes we may think God's table will run out of grace, love, patience, or understanding because we've asked too much. Or we might think there isn't enough room within God's grace for one more mistake. Yet God is a God of abundance. God's kingdom promises plenty for all. God's table never runs out. And guess what? There is plenty left over.

**Remind us again of the abundance of your mercy, O God,
so we might never despair. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Cooks and meal planners

James, Apostle

O let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
but establish the righteous. (v. 9)

A common character in fairy tales is the evil stepmother. In "Hansel and Gretel," for example, she wants nothing to do with the children, so she throws them out on their own in the woods. Action thrillers, Westerns, and superhero movies, too, often involve strongly delineated representations of good and evil.

In real life it's not so clear-cut, but we still wrestle with why there is evil in the world. The members of the early church no doubt agonized about defending good over evil as they faced persecution—even execution—by the Romans. The apostle James, commemorated today, was one of the first to be martyred (Acts 12:1-2). The psalmist, too, struggles with the question of evil in an earlier time.

Although we can't answer why evil exists, we can look to the future with hope that it will come to an end. And our hope isn't just wishful thinking; it's upheld by the promises of God.

Lord, help us to wait with confidence that
your goodness will prevail. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Victims of abuse

God's awesome gift

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. (v. 10)

A man finds an old lamp, picks it up, and rubs it. To his surprise, a genie pops out. The genie says, "I will grant you one wish, but it must be one of these three: you can be the richest, the most popular, or the wisest person in the world." The man thinks and says, "Money doesn't buy happiness, and popularity enslaves you to others. I'll take wisdom." *Poof!* The man stands still, rubbing his chin, until the genie asks what he is thinking. He responds, "I don't think it's working. Perhaps I should have asked for the money."

Wisdom is truly a priceless gem, but it doesn't come out of nowhere, like magic. Scripture tells us the source of wisdom: fear of the Lord. *Fear* in this case isn't the cowering type. "Fear of the Lord" means deep respect and reverence for God, being in awe of the Divine. When you truly think about all that God has done and is doing—creating, sustaining, redeeming—it's hard not to stand in awe. And from that standpoint, with the Spirit's guidance, we can grow in God's awesome gift of wisdom.

Lord God, grant us the wisdom to do and say what you
would have us do and say. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: The wise elders among us

Life everlasting**He will swallow up death forever. (v. 8)**

I'll always remember when my great-aunt was dying. She had smoked for most of her life and had emphysema. Now she was hospitalized, struggling to breathe, and not able to eat or drink. The doctors told her death could come at any time. She asked, "Why does it take so long to croak?" That was my great-aunt—saying it just like it was!

That was the first time I sat with someone as they died. Since then, I have had the honor of witnessing both of my parents die and have sat with countless others who were at various stages of the dying process. Each time my great-aunt's question has come to mind: Lord, why does it take so long to die? Why is death often so painful?

Today's reading is the one my mind always goes to when I am faced with the reality of our mortality. God promises to abolish death. There is no place in God's realm for death to remain. Life—true life—will ultimately prevail. What a promise! What a hope! What an incredible joy to experience!

**Lord, sustain us with your promise of everlasting life.
In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Hospice care workers

Keeping watch

**That same night is a vigil to be kept for the LORD
by all the Israelites. (v. 42)**

When I was young, my mom was in a women's group that made crafts with pinecones. Wreaths, trees, centerpieces—they created all sorts of things with them. Our family spent many a Saturday afternoon searching the woods to find pinecones. My dad told of how on one such trip, my mom hung her purse on a branch and asked me to "keep an eye on it." Being quite literal-minded at the time, I just stood there and stared at it.

The Jewish Passover celebration recalls how God delivered the people out of Egypt. A lesser-known part of the celebration is the "night of vigil." As God kept vigil for the Israelites that first Passover, they are now to keep vigil for God. They are to watch for the great things God is doing.

It's tempting, like me focusing only on Mom's purse, to let the mundane tasks and worries of our days dominate our thoughts. Yet God is always doing great new things in the world. So keep watch—all around—and look for the great things God is doing right now!

**Lord, help us keep watch for the great things you are
doing this day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Night-shift workers

God's provision—to share

They ate and were well filled,
for he gave them what they craved. (v. 29)

When my children were young they were not good at sharing (typical for that developmental stage), so we would tell them that everything we have is a gift from God and so we share things. Apparently, my son took that to heart. A few years on, when we pointed out that we (the parents) owned the TV, so we got first choice of TV shows, he reminded us that everything is from God, so we share!

The Israelites got cranky as they wandered in the desert. They complained about the lack of food. Nehemiah 9:21 testifies that “they lacked nothing,” so it wasn’t that they didn’t have *any* food; apparently they just didn’t think what they had was as good as what they had in Egypt.

Today’s psalm recounts how God sent manna and quail to provide for the people. God provides for us too—sometimes directly to an individual, but often through the community as we ensure that God’s provisions reach everyone sufficiently. All that we have comes from God—food, clothing, work, abilities—with the intent that we, yes, share it!

Lord God, remind us that you are the source of all that we have, and teach us to share. In Christ’s name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Food pantry volunteers and staff

Like ice cream on your lips

... so that the teaching of the LORD
may be on your lips ... (v. 9)

One thing I love in summer is going out for ice cream. It’s my favorite dessert, but I also love this activity because it seems that wherever there is ice cream, there are small children, and I love to watch them eat it. There is as much on their lips and faces as in their mouths! Small children really know how to enjoy ice cream, don’t they?

In today’s reading Moses instructs the people about future Passover celebrations. They are to commemorate their deliverance annually “so that the teaching of the LORD may be on your lips.” In other words, so that not only will they speak the word of the Lord, but that *all* their speech may reflect God’s word.

Our speech says more than just the words themselves. It witnesses to the presence of God in our hearts. Words of forgiveness, mercy, and hope all reflect the God in whom we believe. Today, measure your words carefully, as people might be listening. And may God’s word be as obvious and delightful on your lips as a summer treat on the lips of a child!

Lord God, guide our words so they reflect your goodness and love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Dairy farmers