

Christ in Our Home

July, August, September
2021



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

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.

Mealttime

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.

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.

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Festivals and commemorations

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

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

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.

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.

Christ in Our Home

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Golden calves and other idols

**They exchanged the glory of God
for the image of an ox that eats grass. (v. 20)**

This verse midway through Psalm 106 recalls the story, told in Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 4, of the Israelites molding a golden calf from jewelry they'd brought out of Egypt at the exodus and had melted. When Moses came down from Mount Horeb with the ten commandments, he found them dancing around it.

Psalm 106 refers to this incident along with other sins from Israel's past, but ultimately it gives greater focus to God's steadfast love and goodness—as should we. Of course, the Israelites were not the only ones to forget about God's love. The golden calves of the twenty-first century are anything that separates us from God and turns us from serving our neighbor in God's name. Luther explains the first commandment like this: "We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things" (*ELW*, p. 1160). After all, idols didn't create us, don't redeem us, and can't love us.

The psalm writer both begins and ends with praise and thanks for God's saving love, which always supersedes human sin. And so we pray:

**Thank you, Lord, for you are good: your steadfast love
endures forever. Let all the people say: Amen.**

*Prayer concern: People who work in recovery
and rehabilitation facilities*

Singing our faith

**You shall have a song as in the night
when a holy festival is kept. (v. 29)**

The people of Israel have been in exile under Assyrian rule, but in today's reading God promises to deliver them at last. Isaiah's words assure the people that they will have a song to sing, and gladness of heart, as the Lord, the Rock of Israel, leads them home.

As a pastor's wife, I have attended many funerals over the years. I have grown to especially appreciate the congregational singing of hymns during the service. While the bereaved family in the front pews may be too grief-stricken and lost to sing, we in the congregation join our voices to wash over them with God's assurance of support amid sorrow and ultimate deliverance from death. Whether singing "You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore" for a fisherman in the congregation or "I'll Fly Away" for a bluegrass banjo player, our ministry is to be the body of Christ for our friends. The healing power of hymns is an important gift we can share with those needing hope in times of sadness, and the promise that Christ leads their loved one home.

**Dear Lord, bind us together as we worship and sing
in our congregations. In your holy name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who minister through music

Hope for righteousness and peace

**See, a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule with justice. (v. 1)**

When a government's policies are characterized by injustice and leaders are unrighteous, people in every age hope for a better world and want to make visions like this one in Isaiah 32 their own.

My niece, Sara, was a magistrate for several years. Her job often involved working with families in turmoil. On the desk of her mentor, another Christian judge, was a helpful note, titled "Rules for Being a Good Judge":

1. Stay humble.
2. Pray.
3. Don't be lazy.
4. Keep a calm demeanor.

Sara told me that remaining calm was especially important when people were angry or disrespectful in her courtroom. In working toward being a righteous judge, she practiced mindfulness and prayed that she could listen to each person in front of her. Her hope was to make the best possible decision in each case, for the sake of the children or family involved.

May Isaiah's prediction of righteous leaders be fulfilled in our time.

**Lord Jesus, grant your justice and peace
in our communities, homes, and hearts. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Safe homes and schools for children

The gift of mercy

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down. (v. 8)

In 1975 my husband was serving Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Topeka when Russell, then a young layman, came to him with a request. Could our congregation sponsor a family of Vietnamese refugees for resettlement if he did the legwork? Russell and his wife had already adopted a young boy from Vietnam. The church council voted yes, and on July 8 three generations (eight members) of the Nguyen family flew from Ft. Chafee, Arkansas, into Topeka's airport to a happy welcome. The newspaper sent a reporter and photographer to get the story.

Members of Our Savior's stepped up to provide a modest rental house, clothes, household goods, groceries, and bikes. With Russell's leadership our church members happily pitched in with Christian mercy and hospitality.

Psalm 146 reminds us of God's goodness to those who are oppressed, those who are hungry, prisoners, those who are blind, strangers, refugees, widows, widowers, and orphans. Through us, God reaches out to people in need and lifts them up.

Dear God, bless all ministries that show your love to those who are bowed down. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 23

He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak. (v. 37)

My favorite memories of Sunday school as a child are of when the Flannelboard Lady came to tell a Bible story. Now *I'm* the Flannelboard Lady! I find joy in preparing stories, like today's two healing miracles of Jesus, well enough to tell them by heart while placing colorful figures on a felt background. It amazes me that kids who spend so much time with screens pay rapt attention to this low-tech art form!

It is important for children—and adults—to hear the great stories of our faith, such as how Jesus reached out to help people in need. Today's reading tells of two healings linked by a focus on Jesus' surprising mission. The first recounts his outreach to a foreigner, a Gentile woman, and the second, his outreach to a man with a disability, who was likely often treated with disdain. By pointing to God's gracious actions in Christ, both stories model how we are to serve. May my young listeners learn Jesus' loving ways as well.

God, help us follow the example of Jesus' mission and reach out to those who are outsiders among us. Amen.

Prayer concern: Bible storytellers

Who's in your cloud?

Therefore, since we are surrounded
by so great a cloud of witnesses . . . (12:1)

Some first-century Hebrew Christians were tempted to give up on faith in Jesus because of terrible persecutions. The writer of Hebrews encourages them: "Keep your eyes on Jesus and remember the great cloud of witnesses cheering you on. Run the race. Pass the baton of faith on to the next generation."

Salem Lutheran, the tall white church three miles north of my husband's home farm, was built by congregation members on land donated by his great-grandfathers. They were Black Sea Germans from Russia who immigrated over a century ago to settle the Kansas prairie. The church was built before electricity was available in northwest Kansas, so all holes were drilled by hand with brace and bit.

My husband was baptized and confirmed there. I like to think that his faithful Christian ancestors were his great cloud of witnesses, cheering him on throughout his fifty-year ministry as a Lutheran pastor.

What people make up your cloud of witnesses and inspire you?

**God, thank you for pastors, parents, and other models
of the faithful life. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People who need Christian mentors

Bluegrass evangelism

We will sing to stringed instruments . . .
at the house of the LORD. (v. 20)

Judah's King Hezekiah was so sick he nearly died. When Isaiah told him he would not recover, the king prayed for God to save him, and he lived—for fifteen more years. The king wrote today's prayer in thanks to God.

I serve as one of the fiddle players for a bluegrass worship service. I like that kids and adults bring guitars, banjos, mandolins, string basses, and cellos to play the bluegrass liturgy. Lively gospel hymns bring smiles to worshipers on their way up to communion.

A member organized a church float so our bluegrass band could play in our town's annual parade. We talked her son, Evan, into hopping on at the last minute. He smiled and waved, getting the crowd into clapping and singing as we played "Are You Washed in the Blood," "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," and "I'll Fly Away" over and over for two miles through downtown Littleton.

Maybe God used our music to reach people who do not typically come to "the house of the LORD."

**Thank you, dear God, for instruments and music
to sing your praises. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Church musicians of all ages

Moving mountains

**You will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there,"
and it will move. (v. 20)**

Jesus had just come down from the mountaintop where he was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. The three had wanted to remain longer, but there was ministry to do.

As soon as they were down, a crowd surrounded them. A man knelt before Jesus, asking him to heal his epileptic son. The disciples had tried and failed. Jesus cured the boy instantly, then took his disciples aside to talk to them about their "little faith" (v. 20). Jews were familiar with the idea that a great teacher who could interpret scripture and resolve difficulties was known as an *uprooter* or even a *pulverizer* of mountains. Trusting in the faith planted in them by God, rather than in themselves, the disciples would be able to move metaphorical mountains.

When mountain-like problems block our path, we can trust God's power to help us navigate them.

**God, grant us faith to trust your power and presence
to help us face the problems of each day. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Those facing a hard choice
or decision*

What is your legacy?

**By faith Joseph, at the end of his life,
made mention of the exodus of the Israelites
and gave instructions about his burial. (v. 22)**

Before she died, my friend Dorothy wrote stories of her life growing up on an Iowa farm, her Wartburg College days, and parish life with her pastor husband, Harold. Her family added photos and made a book for each grandchild to keep. The final chapter shares her legacy, the most valuable thing she leaves to her grandchildren—her faith in Jesus Christ.

Today's verses from Hebrews list the Old Testament patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, who "by faith" obeyed and trusted God. Each passed his faith in God's promises down to the next generation.

I try to pass my mother's love of flowers, libraries, music, and church along to my children and grandchildren. My husband and I each grew up with mealtime prayers, daily family devotions, and weekly worship. We continued those practices in our home.

Faith is formed one day at a time, in homes and congregations, from birth to death. What will your legacy be?

**Dear Lord, may my faith in God shine through to all
around me today. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Grandparents

Thanksgiving for recovery

**The LORD protects the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me. (v. 6)**

This psalm of thanks is part of the “Hallel” psalms (113–118), songs of praise for deliverance sung during Israel’s great festivals, such as Passover. Psalm 116 would have been sung after the meal in homes and synagogues. It is likely that Jesus sang this hymn with his disciples (Matthew 26:30) after their last Passover meal together on the night he was betrayed.

This psalm reminds me of when I came down with pneumonia while with my husband on his six-week sabbatical trip to Europe. If you have ever been sick on a trip, you know how scary it is to be at the mercy of unfamiliar doctors and hospital emergency rooms: “I suffered distress and anguish” (v. 3). After a round of antibiotics, I was told to see a doctor in Vienna before traveling on to Ukraine. Our hotel recommended a Christian hospital within walking distance. Inside I took a number and waited my turn. The staff checked me over and cleared me to go. We went on our way, rejoicing and praising God for my recovery.

**Dear God, thank you for your healing power
in times of sickness. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Doctors, nurses, and hospital staff

Under God’s authority

**By what authority are you doing these things,
and who gave you this authority? (v. 23)**

Jesus was teaching in the temple the week before his death when the chief priests and elders challenged him. As the Jewish authorities, they questioned this Jesus who dared to teach in “their” temple. We too are challenged with whether we will recognize this One as God’s Messiah in our midst.

Twenty years ago today, a group of brave passengers on United Flight 93 took authority and charged the cockpit to prevent hijackers from flying into the US capitol building. In her book *Let’s Roll!*, Lisa Beamer describes how her husband, Todd, and other passengers called upon God before taking action that would mean certain death for them all. They were heard praying the Lord’s Prayer and Psalm 23 before Todd’s phone went dead and the plane crashed into a Pennsylvania field.

At the end of Matthew’s gospel Jesus claims, “All authority . . . has been given to me” and promises to be with us always (28:18-20). Faith that God is with us in Jesus can give us courage to do remarkable, heroic, or even mundane things we could never do on our own.

**Thank you, God, that part of Jesus’ authority
is to be with us and give us strength to act,
even amid fear and danger. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Families of victims of the 9/11 attacks



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 24

**Let them deny themselves and take up their cross
and follow me. (v. 34)**

Jesus had been traveling with his disciples. Everywhere they went people brought loved ones who were sick to him for healing and he showed compassion. His disciples watched and learned.

Sherry Weddell, cofounder of the Catherine of Siena Institute, was surprised that Lutherans invited her, a Roman Catholic, to speak at their conference. She shared disturbing statistics about large numbers of people in the US leaving both Catholic and Protestant churches. After her talks on forming intentional disciples today, I eagerly bought her books.

Lutherans have a long history of sending missionaries abroad to make disciples for Christ and accompany others in their walk of faith. Now we recognize that the mission field is also right here, and that *we* are missionaries. As followers of Jesus called to take up the cross, we imitate Jesus in showing compassion and love to all, and in sharing the peace and healing he offers through our willing hands and hearts.

**Let us ever walk with Jesus and follow his example of
mercy and compassion. In his precious name we pray. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Someone who needs
compassion today*

Wandering sheep

**I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
seek out your servant. (v. 176)**

John Ylvisaker's popular hymn "Borning Cry" tells of our life journey with God, beginning with our first cry and lasting until we close our eyes in death. One stanza says, "I was there when you were but a child, with a faith to suit you well; in a blaze of light you wandered off to find where demons dwell" (ELW 732). We all wander at times, like lost sheep, from our faith in God. Whether we are religiously unaffiliated—what the Pew Research Center calls "nones"—or have moved in and out of church circles, our loving Shepherd continually seeks us out and welcomes us home.

Rick grew up in a nonreligious family. His grandmother took a special interest in his faith development and enrolled him in a Methodist kindergarten in Texas. The Sermon on the Mount in particular planted a seed in his heart. In high school Rick drifted away from church. Forty years later, an "All Are Welcome" church sign in Colorado prompted him to walk through the doors. Now Rick leads the homeless ministry in his church.

**Send us out as your agents, gentle Shepherd,
to seek your lost sheep and bring them home. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Those seeking a
welcoming congregation*

Holy Cross Day

But we proclaim Christ crucified. (v. 23)

Holy Cross Day began in Jerusalem in the early fourth century when a church was built over what was believed to be the place of the crucifixion. The forty-day period before September 14 became a special season to honor the central symbol of the Christian faith. We are reminded how the crucified Lord lifts up those living in poverty, those who are outcast, and the little ones of this world. As baptized Christians we are marked with the cross of Christ, the sign of the world's salvation.

In our travels my husband and I have collected crosses from various countries. His crosses cover a wall in our home and offer talking points when guests come. Mine are cross necklaces from places such as Assisi in Italy, Patmos in Greece, Krakow in Poland, and the blue glass cross from the Venetian island of Murano. Inevitably, when I wear them, strangers ask about my cross and sometimes initiate conversations about faith.

Our crosses bear witness to others that we are followers of Jesus, whose death for all is a testimony to God's great love.

Jesus, we praise and thank you for the holy cross, symbol of our salvation through your death and resurrection. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those traveling today

Christian courage

I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me. (v. 29)

Jesus knew the Jewish authorities were plotting to arrest him and have him killed. Surely it took courage to stand in the temple daily, preaching God's love for all. Jesus was doing his Father's will in a dangerous time and place. Confidence that we follow this Jesus as Messiah can also empower us to act courageously in love for our neighbors.

I saw such great Christian courage in the staff of Beacon Neighborhood House, a Presbyterian mission in Chicago. In 1962 I was one of thirteen college volunteers who lived and worked there with children and families experiencing poverty. Each day we taught vacation Bible school, tutored, and took the kids on public transportation for field trips throughout the city. At night we slept there, behind locked iron gates.

I admired and still remember Rev. Ray Day, the soft-spoken pastor who lived nearby with his wife and seven children. Every day he quietly modeled Christian leadership, service, and courage for all of us.

Lord Jesus, grant courage to those who follow in your footsteps of care and compassion. Amen.

Prayer concern: Inner-city churches, pastors, and staff

The medium is the message

... so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom
but on the power of God. (v. 5)

Love letters—even in the age of email and text—are almost always handwritten. Why? A love letter typed, printed, and put in an envelope with a mailing label wouldn't fully convey the personal nature of the intended message. As the saying goes, the medium is the message.

Paul came to the church in Corinth in humility, not relying on lofty words or personal qualifications. Why? Because the power of God's redeeming love is proclaimed not in human strength but in the weakness of a baby in a manger, a rabbi hanging out with the vulnerable, the Messiah dying on a cross. The medium (weakness, humility) is the message (love, not power or force).

What's more, the love of God is intended for people caught in their own weaknesses. Your flaws and failures don't exclude you from God's grace; they are precisely where God shows up to meet your need. Through the weakness of the One who died on the cross God has handwritten a love letter for us. Like Paul, we share that love humbly with others.

**God of grace, help us know your great love
through the humble sacrifice of Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Stationery and greeting card makers

Seeing what's already there

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (4:8)

Have you ever been looking for something and just couldn't find it? You look in drawers and cupboards, but you don't see it. You're sure it was there! Then someone else comes along and says, "Here it is!" It was right there all along, but you didn't see it because it wasn't where you thought it should be or it didn't look exactly like you expected.

James encourages his community to draw near to God and promises that God will draw near to them. This might sound like God stays away from us until we move closer to God. But that wouldn't be like the God of grace we know and trust. Drawing near to God is more like trying to see God who is already there, but we keep not seeing. Maybe we expect to find God only in a certain place, or only appearing a certain way. Drawing near might mean being open to how God is present now in unexpected ways. Then we suddenly see God, as the One who has been right there all along but now suddenly draws near in new ways.

**Ever-present God, open our eyes to see where and how
you are near to us now, in Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those looking for God in their lives

Look for the Helper

**But surely, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder of my life. (v. 4)**

Fred Rogers spent a lifetime teaching children how to feel secure and loved. One of his sage bits of guidance came from his mother: When you're in a scary or difficult time, look for the helpers. Look for the people you can trust to assist you through your struggles. This is heartwarming advice for children and adults alike. Sometimes, however, human helpers seem nowhere to be found.

The psalmist expresses desperation at what enemies have done. There seem to be no helpers nearby. At the same time, the writer prays to God with a faith convinced that "surely, God is my helper," even when no one else is there. The psalmist trusts God to deal with enemies and, even in advance, gives praise and offerings to God for being this Helper.

Whether human helpers are available or not, we can always call on God in our need and know that God listens. We can always look for our Helper and know that God stands ready to rescue, heal, and deliver us.

**O God, help me in my struggles, and help those
who feel helpless and alone. Amen.**

Prayer concern: First responders



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 25

**Whoever wants to be first must be last of all
and servant of all. (v. 35)**

Sometimes it seems we are all competing for the same spaces. Parking lots are crowded with people rushing for an open spot. Freeways are packed with cars trying to get ahead of others. Schools, housing, admission to universities—we're often trying to beat others to get a spot.

Jesus calls out his followers for always putting themselves first. They want to make sure they have a spot at the top. He wants them to pursue a different way through life: serving others by humbly making room in our lives and in society for them to have a place too. It doesn't mean we have no place; it means our place is found in making room for another.

Some of us are used to having spaces that include us; others rarely have a place left for them. How can you make room in your life for someone else's need? Who hasn't been included in your spaces? When we give up pushing other people out of the way, we discover that God's grace makes room for us all.

**Thank you, God, for making room for us through Jesus
Christ. In his name, help us make room for others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People on the margins of society

A good kind of data breach

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. (v. 1)

We live in an age when many of us have shared vast amounts of information about ourselves. Search engines and social media apps gather data on us from everything we do. We may not even know how much information others have about us. Many of us are disturbed that a corporation might know so much about us. We know they could use that information to market products to us and sell our information to other companies or nations, some of which are “bad actors.” It is not always good or safe to be known so thoroughly.

The psalm writer knows that God knows each of us so well that it is almost unbearable. God knows everything about us, and we can't hide. This could be threatening or unsettling. But the psalmist knows something more important about God: God made us and loves us. And that is good news! “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,” the psalmist declares (v. 6). Being fully known by God becomes our freedom and joy when we know that God's love embraces us just as we are. God's knowledge of us, and our faith in God's goodness, means we are safe.

**All-knowing God, you know us and love us fully and always.
Help us know you more fully, in Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Cybersecurity specialists

Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners. (v. 13)

Matthew was not popular in the community. He collected taxes from his neighbors for far-away Rome. If people didn't pay, he had to enforce punishment. If he could get a little extra from them and pocket it as profit, why wouldn't he? Then Matthew's life was changed. Perhaps he had heard Jesus talk about helping those who were poor, about not letting love of money mess up one's life, and about forgiveness. Or maybe it was the immediate and transforming power of Jesus' presence and call.

A lot of folks didn't like that Jesus had dinner with the likes of Matthew, but that's exactly how Jesus did ministry. He welcomed and loved everyone, especially those considered beyond God's grace. That's how all of us are changed: Jesus welcomes us, even when we're unworthy or unwelcomed by others.

Maybe you have been excluded from a community. Jesus says, “You belong. You're the reason I'm here. And also, anyone *you're* still trying to keep away from the dinner table—they're invited too.” Because in the end, it's not about being righteous, but being the very objects of God's love and mercy.

**O God, we rejoice that you welcome us. In Jesus' name
help us welcome others we are tempted to exclude. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Government workers

Alone but not abandoned

**And the one who sent me is with me;
he has not left me alone. (v. 29)**

Children who experience loss of a parent or other painful trauma can have deep anxiety about being abandoned. Many of us find it difficult to be alone for long periods. Loneliness can bring terrible sadness.

Jesus spoke about “being lifted up,” referring to being on the cross. He told people that when they saw him lifted up, they would realize God was with him. Jesus trusted God in the very moment when he might appear to have been abandoned by God. In John’s gospel, Jesus most fully revealed God in himself on the cross. Why? Because God is the one who never abandons us. We know God in Jesus, so we know God is with us even in the moments when we feel most forsaken.

Even as some of us seek healing from traumatic experiences, we can trust that God is with us. Others of us can find hope in times of loneliness. We may feel very alone at times, but we are never abandoned. The cross is our sign. Jesus is our promise. God is with us, always.

**God of eternal presence, help us trust that you come to us
with the deep love shown in Jesus. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Children in foster care

Spirit of boldness

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

Sometimes sharing the good news of Christ is met with resistance. Feeding people who are hungry upsets those who think everyone should earn everything. Speaking words of forgiveness angers some people when the ones receiving forgiveness have offended them.

A pastor worked hard to get her church to address problems in the community, including feeding those who were homeless and ending racial injustice. The congregation didn’t welcome the pastor’s ministry. Out of anger they made life horrible for her, and she eventually resigned the call. But she didn’t stop preaching and working for the good news. She was bold and faithful.

The early followers of Jesus faced rejection, yet they shared the good news “with boldness.” The Holy Spirit gave them courage. The ministry of Jesus is bigger than our fears and resistance. The Holy Spirit makes us bold to share love.

What parts of the church’s ministry do you resist? Where is God’s Spirit calling and equipping you to share the good news with boldness?

**Holy Spirit, make us bold to speak in love
and act in mercy for Jesus’ sake. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Pastors and deacons

A bit of honey

... sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb. (v. 10)

There's something about chocolate that hits the spot and brings a smile to many people's lips. But there's so much that goes into a single piece of chocolate—or, for that matter, a sweet drop of honey. There's hard work, waiting, and a process from start to finish.

God's law was given as a gift to show God's people how to live in relationship with God, others, and all creation. While that law is a beautiful gift for our benefit, we often struggle to follow God's teachings. As with bees seeking out nectar, communicating to each other where to go and then returning to the hive to make honey, our learning to live in light of God's law must be an active and intentional process. The road isn't easy or even straightforward (think of the bees' complicated waggle dance!), but it's full of renewal and wisdom (v. 7), joy (v. 8), and sweetness (v. 10). In committing to enter fully into the process of learning, making mistakes, and trying again, we appreciate the richness and sweetness of God's goodness in our lives.

**Creative God, thank you for helping us taste
the sweetness of life in Christ each and every day. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Beekeepers, chocolatiers,
confectioners*

Our needs fulfilled

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law
or the prophets . . . but to fulfill [them]. (v. 17)

When we order something and it's delivered and complete, we say it has been "fulfilled"; it's on our doorstep or ready for pickup. Oxford Languages defines *fulfillment* as "the achievement of something desired, promised, or predicted." Jesus states that he is the fulfillment of, the making good on God's promises to God's people. In him, the gift of God's law is lived out in its fullest sense.

We all sin and fall short. Thankfully, God became human to do what we couldn't do—fulfill the law and the prophets, truly walking in God's ways. And so we're made righteous through Christ, not through anything we've done. *Christ* makes us right before God through his self-giving life and death on the cross. In Jesus, you are already salt and light (vv. 13-14) because you *have been made* bright and well seasoned. You're already illuminated by the current of God's love and grace running through your life. The delivery of grace is on your doorstep. Thanks be to God!

**Thank you, Jesus, for being the embodiment of God's mercy
and justice. Help us to live illuminated by this truth. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Warehouse workers
and delivery drivers*



Time after Pentecost—Lectionary 26

You bear the name of Christ. (v. 41)

What's your family name? Is it important to you to know the history connected to that name and to honor it? Knowing some of what our ancestors who bore our name said and did can make us swell with pride or shame. Wonderful accomplishments, courage, and faithfulness can encourage us while the sins of our fathers and mothers can be an embarrassment or a liability.

When we're baptized, we're baptized into Jesus' name and into his death and resurrection. From that point on we carry his name and legacy in us. That's a promise both intimidating and inviting. As followers of Jesus our words and actions ought to reflect him to those around us. We will never ever be perfect disciples, but Jesus assures us that even the simplest gestures done in love and in his name make an impact in the kingdom of God. So what would it look like to remember that Jesus' name is the one you bear?

**Jesus, it's an honor and joy to bear your name.
Give us wisdom to bear your love in the world. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Genealogists

Birth pangs

**By his great mercy he has given us a new birth
into a living hope. (v. 3)**

Those words sound poetic, promising, uplifting. Yet it strikes me: birth is painful, messy, a struggle. In Romans 8:22 we read, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now." Yet 1 Peter says this promise is reason to rejoice, even if we "have had to suffer various trials" (v. 6), because the result will be even greater praise when Christ is revealed. Furthermore, sorrow and grief, trial and struggle can produce character of faith and abiding joy in us.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought "labor pains" of struggle and grief. It also brought new ways of understanding ourselves and our neighbors, creativity, and innovation, and has taught us patience and resilience. What new life might be brought forth in the struggles you are experiencing right now? Where are hope and joy rising up out of the ashes? Even when we cannot see God, by the power of the Holy Spirit we put one foot in front of the other, trusting that Jesus will be revealed to us. And he is.

**God, in scripture you are described as like a mother.
Give us understanding to see where you are
bringing forth new life. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those struggling with infertility

A life of awe and wonder

I will bow down toward your holy temple
in awe of you. (v. 7)

What takes your breath away? Is it a brilliant sunrise or sunset? A mountain vista? A song that lifts your heart? The unbridled laughter of a child?

People who seem to be magnets for others are often those with a sense of joy, awe, and wonder. They delight in the simple and beautiful. Others notice and are attracted to these people because they offer a refreshing change from the cynicism and apathy we often encounter in the world. Such people exude lightness where drudgery, divisiveness, and stress seem to rule.

David, to whom this psalm is attributed, isn't having an easy time of it. Yet because the steadfast love of God surrounds and upholds him, he stands in awe of God's goodness. Awareness of and gratitude for God enables him to see a larger picture. This shift to gratitude helps him "sing for joy" and "exult" in the Lord (v. 11), because it's not based on circumstances but on trusting God's presence. Today, may we cultivate awe and wonder, and give thanks because God is.

**Teach us to develop awe, wonder, and gratitude
in each moment. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Outdoor adventure
and nature guides*

Michael and All Angels

Bless the LORD, . . . you mighty ones who do his bidding,
obedient to his spoken word. (v. 20)

St. Michael the Archangel is known as a warrior, leading God's heavenly host into battle against the forces of evil. It's a powerful image and prevalent in a variety of art and literature across the centuries. While the idea of a fierce protector looking over us is appealing, especially in times of trouble, I'm more familiar with angels in a different sense.

The Greek *angelos* means "messenger." The messages I most need to hear often appear in unexpected ways through all sorts of people, as well as through creation. I wonder at how God communicates divine messages through ordinary means, making angels out of everyday people and things. If God can deliver forgiveness and grace using promises spoken with water, bread, and wine, how might our families, friends, acquaintances, strangers, and the natural world convey God's love? And how might *we*, in our blessed imperfection, do God's bidding as messengers of grace and good news?

**Lord of hosts, may we receive your divine messages
and be messengers of your grace. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Postal workers

The fingerprint of the Holy One

When I look at your heavens,
the work of your fingers . . . (v. 3)

Ask any craftsperson or maker and they will tell you about the joys and struggles of creating. Looking at a piece, they see all the work, time, and care that went into it, as well as its beauty. We look at creation—a field of bright wildflowers, graceful and powerful wildlife, bright stars twinkling in the velvety night sky—and we marvel at the work of God’s hands. Yet we look in the mirror or at other people and are quick to judge, to find flaws or “problem areas.”

But the psalmist goes on: “You have made [humans] a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor” (v. 5). Companies and culture readily tell us how to improve or how to achieve the desired look. But we’ve been made in God’s image and bear the fingerprints of the Holy One down to our DNA! How might our self-image and our perception of others change by seeing ourselves and others through the eyes of our Creator? By recognizing the love, care, attention, and creativity through which God has fashioned us?

**Sovereign One, help us see and marvel at the beauty
you’ve placed in us and in each other. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those struggling with body image

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